Sevens

8 - The Eighth Generation F***ed up Big Time

Wai

Prologue

… A meeting room in the guild.

The receptionists gathered up by the higher-ups accepted the documents pertaining to the labyrinth discovered. They were discussing which parties to offer the opportunity to clear it.

Black haired bob-cut Tanya reset her glasses as she confirmed the contents.

(At worst, up to ten floors in scale. It has been confirmed there is a boss monster per floor. After making their way to the third floor, the reconnaissance party safely returned.)

The difficulty of clearing it definitely wasn't high. It could even be regarded as an easy one.

So that's why they had to take care in their party selection. If they just sent a large number to clear it, then if a casualty surfaced, the numbers of adventurers in service to the guild would decrease.

Even if adventurers gathered in Beim by the day, sending a squad out to be annihilated would only cause the Labyrinth to grow.

The one heading the meeting was a normal resident supervisor who wasn't a sweeper or anything.

Hair parted in a three to seven ration, a small mustache, and a slim build. The male staff member looked over the documents only he had in hand, and confirmed it with the rest.

"Does anyone here have a party they'd recommend? Even if you throw the names out, there's a possibility they'll decline, so having a bit more is fine. We're going for a number where it won't be too much trouble if everyone called for can go. And make sure you only recommend parties you think can handle it. No parties out on requests of which you don't know when they'll be back."

The female receptionist sitting next to Tanya,【Marianne】was the

girl who manned the counter directly opposite to her.

Not a sweeper, she had straight blond hair, and emerald drooping eyes. Her atmosphere was one that made one think of her as an elder sister, and she often carried about a somewhat fluffy, and laid-back impression.

She let out a sigh, and grumbled over how there was no point in her attending the meeting.

“I fundamentally only deal with newbies here.”

On those words, Tanya laughed to herself a bit.

“These meetings are an obligation. And perhaps the day will come when one of your charges is to challenge a Labyrinth, you know?”

Hearing that, Marianne shook her head.

“How many years are you talking about here? By that time, my place will have been taken up by a younger and prettier girl. There are a few it’d pay to bet on, but right now, they’re all oblivious young’uns. When you stir them up to do work like that, you’re aware that not even half of them succeed, aren’t you?”

The parties Marianne tended to were made up of new adventurers who had come to Beim without any appropriate knowledge, or parties with a lack of competence.

For parties such as those, the guild kept plenty of receptionists like her to lead them on the path to become proficient adventurers.

Tanya looked at the blackboard in the meeting room as she nodded. It was covered by the names of the various parties being recommended.

“Come to think of it.”

Around her, the other receptionists were putting out the names of the parties they favored. There were plenty of receptionists at the guild and those receptionists had plenty of adventurers they got along well with.

It was a form of connection making to take care of the stream of requests flooding into the city.

Tanya thought a bit, and raised her hand.

“Oh, it’s rare to get a recommendation from you, Tanya. So who is it you want to nominate?”

It wasn’t strange for the supervisor to be so surprised. Of all else, this was the first time Tanya had ever recommended a party for a labyrinth.

For both the east guild branch, and the adventurers of it, Labyrinth clearing was a huge merit. It gave a chance for those adventurers to gain the treasures at the depths of the maze.

For that sake, there were plenty of adventurers who tried to curry favor with their receptionists. But while Tanya was a receptionist on the surface, she was a sweeper below.

She would occasionally dispose of the criminals among the adventurers, though she did desk work most of the time. But that was also so she could get a good look of the faces of the resident adventurers.

That being the case, she really didn’t have any interest in recommendations.

However, this time…

“I would like to put forth the party headed by Lyle. Their serial number is…”

The supervisor looked through the documents in his hand for the records pertaining to Lyle.

“Ah, that party, I see. They really are an interesting bunch. They look to be able to deal with most things, and their general formation is an all-purpose one to take on any sort of request… but don’t you think it’s a little too fast?”

As a party that had only been in Beim little over a month, they had received high evaluations on their request. But the problem was that

they had barely just arrived.

From the eyes of another, it would seem they were receiving preferential treatment.

“I believe that have enough ability for it. And…”

“And?”

When the supervisor showed his interest, Tanya smiled a little.

“While they truly are quite an interesting party, they’re quite proficient, so I think it best we keep them with us.”

The supervisor looked at the papers as he stroked his chin. He nodded a number of times…

❼

Having completed a request, I dropped by Beim’s eastern-most guild branch… the east branch.

I had taken a bath, so my blue hair was damp. It had grown quite a bit, so I was thinking of cutting it sometime in the near future.

When I entered the guild lobby, I found the same wide space just as crowded as always.

With her pals verdure hair, Miranda was wearing a heavy coat over her clothing. It was cold after all.

I was the same, but I wore a robe instead.

Under it was my casual clothing, with a sabre and knife hung at my waist.

I looked around for a line that didn’t look like it would take too long.

“It’s as crowded as ever. Maybe we should have come tomorrow?”

Miranda had just returned, taken a bath and had a light meal, so she looked a little sleepy.

This time's request was to carry out multiple jobs at a village near Beim. Monster hunting, as well as assisting in repairing the village, and some other odd jobs.

Normally, they'd have to send multiple parties for that one, but as ours was one that could accomplish most jobs with our few numbers, we negotiated a bit and took it up.

In exchange, it we made it so we wouldn't be obligated to take up requests for a while.

So with a free month ahead of us, I was thinking of challenging Beim's own personal Labyrinth.

"I want to get this over with quickly. We're going to be off tomorrow, so wouldn't it feel better to rest from morning to night?"

I took the envelope with the paperwork in hand, and lined up. Miranda followed.

"Then go shopping with me tomorrow. Isn't it fine? You went and bought a pendant for Shannon, yet nothing for me?"

Ha ha ha. I laughed, as I panicked some in my head.

(Crap! Did I not get anything for Miranda yet… but I get the feeling I went whopping with her a bit before the request…? No, that was Aria!)

To make sure she didn't make out my panic, I spoke.

"It was just a cheap one, though. Did you want a pendant?"

Miranda smiled.

"If it's from you, Lyle, then anything is fine. If you want to keep it cheap as possible, I'll even let you off with a kiss."

To the kiss she blew my way, I told her I'd find her something nice, as I clenched the blue Jewel hanging from my neck.

First came the Third in the same removed tone as always.

『Yo, why'd you forget Miranda-chan? When she's the one you need

to be most cautious with… By the way, I think the kiss's the gift she'll be most happy with.』

The Fourth spoke irritantly ay me.

『That's why I told you to keep a journal! Listen here, you've got eight of them! There's no way you'll remember everything going on! Diligently record everything, and take action by a plan!』

The Fifth goaded him as he…

『Yet you were so troubled by a single Mama. And wait, Lyle… I'm not sure what to think of you taking action just because you were told to. If you keep the minimum level of interaction, then you can avoid getting to deep into it. Watch yourself.』

The Sixth, with Miranda being his favorite.

『… I'm sure I said something similar. You really are no good in that field.』

My doting grandfather… the Seventh.

『Hey how about you guys give some actual advice? Lyle, giving a cold refusal here is an option, you know. Listen here, I've never had myself stuck under Zenoire's thumb, I tell you. At times like these…』

I listened to his opinion, while I…

(No, grandmother had you rolling about quite nicely on the palm of her hand. Come to think of it, she was quite amazing…)

While I felt like I was going to break into a cold sweat, there were other adventurers around.

And in such a situation, if we put out such a sweet air…

"Keh! Well look at you."

The one who took such a blatantly displeased attitude was【Erhart Baumann】, in a different line.

He was wearing a tank top above, but this time he draped a coat-like thing over it. He had a large sword over his back, and his

comrades were around him.

He was glaring my way.

(Does this really look like something to be jealous of?)

I gave a vague smile to try and play it off, but our relation was one where he had picked a fight with me the day I got here. It doesn't seem he thinks of me a rival, but he held a strong opposition, and a belligerent personality.

However…

"Next, Erhart-kun~. Ah, you're glaring again! That's no good!"

After the adventurers in front of him finished up their business and headed off somewhere, Erhart walked up to the blond, large-chested receptionist with a smile on his face.

"O-of course not, Marianne-san. He was just being noisy. I'll be there right away."

With his head in the clouds, he reported the day's results to the receptionist known as Marianne.

"We divided labor, and finished up the cleaning of the gutters. Here are the documents!"

"Yes, good work… this is amazing! You've only ever gotten『D』s up to now, but you've finally been awarded a『C』. You've worked your hardest, haven't you? I'm overjoyed."

"Ehe, ehehehe."

Looking at a delighted Erhart's party, the adventurers around quietly whispered amongst themselves.

"Hey, isn't that…"
"I'll bet. The beauty's a newbie exclusive."
"So they don't know a thing… 'tis a pity."

I tilted my head at whether they were pitiful or not. It's just, the individuals themselves seemed extremely happy, and they were heading down a respectable adventurer's path.

(… To those guys, perhaps this way is best.)

As I watched over their exchange, Erhart turned to me with a triumphant expression on his face. It appears he was bragging over the fact his personal receptionist was a beauty.

My face was lightly grasped

Miranda smiled as she…

“Perhaps you shouldn’t look that way. You’ll make me jealous.”

I remover her hands, and sighed.

“Surely you’re joking. You were having quite a bit of fun watching that one.”

I knew Miranda’s personality. If she really was jealous, she would use all emans at her disposal to eliminate the source.

Of course, before it came to that, she’d take various measure to make sure it didn’t happen to begin with.

“Sure, it’s fun to watch, but don’t stare at her so intently. Just take some discreet glances and I won’t mind.”

Miranda had also noticed how Erhart’s party was being used quite nicely, it seems. I stopped looking over so openly.

The line moved, and we waited out turn.

Today’s receptionist was one I was seeing for the first time today, of whose name I was not aware.

Miranda and I sat, and the receptionist accepted the envelope along with our guild cards.

She courteously opened the documents, and confirmed their contents. While her expression didn’t change, she nodded as she praised our work.

“A『B』for every task performed. Splendid work. There was a wide variety of tasks to this one, but that doesn’t seem to be a problem. We’ll be placing our expectations on you as we have.”

She promptly processed it, before returning the papers and our guild cards. She stood to go pick up our reward.

After she had distanced herself a bit, Miranda spoke in a bit of a let-down tone.

“Huge difference from Arumsaas. I heard they received a proper education, but I never thought it’d be to this level. I had a rougher image of them in my mind.”

Just what was she expecting?

The receptionist brought the reward soon enough, and confirmed the monetary sum with me. But at the same time.

“Lyle-san, was it? You’ve completed a number of requests, so please stop by with the rest of your adventurer comrades within the month. You’ve got to complete the paperwork to renew your guild cards as well, so can I ask you to show your faces at some regular interval?”

Her polite treatment made me remember Hawkins-san, who dealt with me when I first became an adventurer in Dalien.

“Alright. Then in the near future.”

“I’ll leave it to you. Would you like to renew your guild card?”

Miranda took out her card, the receptionist accepted it, and immediately went into the renewal process.

“Ah…”

It seems she suddenly remembered something, as she turned to me with somewhat of a serious expression.

Giving a light apology as she returned Miranda’s card…

“Lyle-san, your party has received a request for Labyrinth Subjugation. If you do plan to go, it would be a big help if you finished everyone’s renewals before you head off.”

My face met Miranda’s, and we both turned back to look at the receptionist’s.

“Labyrinth Subjugation, is it?”

Her expression turned a little troubled, but she explained.

“Yes. A Labyrinth has been discovered, and a request sent out to clear it, so… huh? Have you yet to confirm it?”

The information on current Labyrinths was posted on a bulletin in the loby. That I knew. But we hadn’t been in Beim long enough for that.

When I explained that fact to her, she…

“Understandable. But the request has only just been issued, so you have the ability to decline. The planned departure date is in a week’s time after all.”

I to her.

“I want to speak with my comrades, so we’ll decide whether to take it up or not by tomorrow. Is it alright if we give the report then?”

She nodded.

“Yes, I don’t mind. It is best you finish it quickly. Within two days would be ideal.”

The paperwork ended, and having accepted the reward, me and Miranda stood from our seats, and walked through the lobby to exit the guild.

Miranda.

“That was faster than I thought it’d be.”

“Yeah, I also get the feeling it may have been too fast.”

I had thought we wouldn’t get one for our first three months at least.

But surprisingly enough, the Labyrinth Subjugation Request had been sent out.

From within the Jewel, the Sixth’s doubtful voice could be heard.

『It’s going too smoothly. If only nothing happens…』

He seemed to be thinking there was a trap waiting for us, but I can't think of a reason for the guild to do such a thing. Even if we weren't giving our all, it should stil be true we were proficient adventurers to them.

(Is something going on?)

While I was lost in thought, Miranda looked over at the bulletin on the wall.

"Ah, there really is a Labyrinth Subjugation request. Our number's on it."

The numbers assigned to adventurers and parties were listed under the notice.

Those numbers were carved into our guild cards, and I confirmed the digits again.

"It really is."

Something felt off, but it was also a happy miscalculation for us to be able to challenge a Labyrinth so soon.

1 - Labyrinth Clearing Beim Style

In Beim, it went that adventurers would be dispatched to Labyrinths once a gathering thought possible to clear it was assembled.

If a Labyrinth was left be, it would spit up a large number of monsters and cause heavy damages to the surrounding area, so clearing them was a must.

At times, a town or city would manage one to reap tremendous profits off of them. But that management required a considerable number of people.

Not just a presiding lord, starting with controlling the area around the Labyrinth, and getting the Adventurers' Guild's assistance, it was quite a bit of a pain.

But if that was successful, the Labyrinth became a well of fortune.

It would continue throwing out monsters, so one could get their hands on a large number of Magic Stones. At times, it was even possible to find treasures.

And as long as you didn't take away the treasure in the deepest chamber, it would continue producing that wealth without running dry. However, if you failed, a large mass of monsters would emerge, and there was quite a risk of such management cities falling to ruin.

Beim's guild received requests to clear them from other lands, but they also surveyed areas of their own accord, and found Labyrinths themselves, it seems.

But the ones they dispatched were there for surveying, and they didn't have the proper equipment to go challenge a Labyrinth.

And for that sake, the guild dispatched adventurers.

"So that's how it is… I want to join the Labyrinth Subjugation in a

week’s time.”

Having returned from the guild to our inn, I gathered our worn-out members, and gave an explanation.

Shannon was holding onto her pillow with a sleepy expression, and it didn’t seem she was listening at all.

Rather than Monica not being interested, she just said she’d go if I was going, and wouldn’t if I was not.

She prepared tea for everyone, and once that was done, she stood on standby near me.

Aria stroked her hair as she…

“More importantly, what are you going to do about this time’s reward? You couldn’t possibly be thinking to use it all to prepare for Labyrinth clearing, right?”

While she didn’t seem too worried about the Labyrinth, Aria didn’t have any intentions of unhanding her portion of the reward.

It was evenly divided nine ways, and properly distributed every time.

“I’m thinking of using what we earned in Centralle this time around. And wait, I’ll also cover a bit of the costs on my side, so get your equipment in order. I’ll be going to the guild to voice our decision tomorrow, so could you check how long you think it’ll take by then?”

Even if I gathered all our comrades, our party was a small one.

I had a large sum of my own, and our earnings were cleanly divided between members, but there wasn’t such a thing as a joint party fund.

Normally, there was a tacit rule that your own maintenance was to be done with your own wallet.

Eva looked a little relieved.

“Participating in it’ll be a huge help on my inexperience. And wait, it’ll be my first time in a Labyrinth and all, so I don’t have the slightest idea what to assemble… ah, let’s go shopping together, Novem!”

As Eva's tone begged to be pampered, Novem gave a wry smile.

"Of course. What will you do, May-san?"

May's appearance was young, and she was sitting on a sofa drinking some cocoa Monica prepared. She liked sweet beverages over tea.

"You wish to go shopping? But I really don't need equipment or anything like that. And it's not like it's my first Labyrinth or anything. Even like this, I've crushed a few in my day."

Everyone directed surprised eyes, but while she held the form of a young woman, her original form was that of a quilin.

Golden short hair, and blue eyes.

A small build, but large chest. Showing her navel, showing her shoulders, showing her thighs, the girl in quite cold-looking attire was no human.

Novem.

"Then perhaps a robe or coat? Those clothes do look cold, and they stand out quite a bit."

To Novem's opinion, May nodded.

"Yeah~ then that's what I'll do. I don't see how I'm going to use my money in the first place."

As May didn't really seem to mind, the problem was Aria.

Monica looked at her, held a tray up to cover her mouth, and grinned.

"Well isn't that nice. You won't have to worry about equipment anymore."

Aria usually had a high monetary expenditure.

It's not that she was wasting it. She used a number of pieces of equipment, and those cost money. With that being the case, I decided to cover the expense.

(What's more, she was talking about replacing them not too long ago.)

Of course, Miranda similarly ran through her gear quite quickly, yet she was managing it just fine. Therefore, Aria's standing was a low one.

She averted her eyes from me and Monica, and sealed her mouth. Miranda looked at her.

"Aria, you really should think more about where your money goes. Even if your income has increased, Beim has various expenses here and there. You understand that, right?"

Aria gave an excuse.

"… It just came at a bad time. And there was the armor renewal and all. If we're planning to conquer a Labyrinth, then even I can…"

(Well, that's why I'm putting up the maintenance cost, though.)

Around that time, Shannon's head was shaking up and down like a boat as she clutched the pillow.

Miranda pinched her face with quite a bit of force. With teary eyes, Shannon unhanded her pillow, and struggled to get Miranda's hands away from her.

And once she was free, Shannon…

"… Hey, isn't it fine if I just keep house? I'm not even part of the fighting force, and I think it would be best for all parties if I just took it easy in Beim."

To her sister that insisted not to count herself into our forces, Miranda lowered her fist with a smile.

I.

"Rejected. With just nine people to our name, you think it's safe if we leave one behind in this city? And we'll be leaving you at our base regardless."

Base did not refer to the Guild branch we made use of.

When challenging a Labyrinth, adventurers of Beim would prepare simple tents and other such places to sleep. And when those tents gather together, you could get hundreds or thousands of them clustered based on the scale.

After dragging themselves out of the depths of the mazes, the adventurers would need such a place aboveground to rest. That was the base.

I looked at Clara.

She was patiently sitting on the sofa, sipping her tea.

When our eyes met, she gave a simple nod to show she had no problems with it.

Hailing from a Labyrinth city, and with ample experience as Support, it did not seem Clara had anything to say.

I brought the conversation together.

“I’ll be asking what’s necessary tomorrow. I’ll hand out the necessary expenses when you give those explanations.”

So everyone began to move to prepare for a Labyrinth in a week’s time.

❼

The morning of the next day.

When I left the inn, I ended up running into a rare acquaintance.

Exiting, I found the narrow-eyed man who had referred us on the first day loitering around.

“Ah, fancy seeing you here.”

“Oh my. Morning, rising rookie of expectations.”

The smiling man called me a rookie of expectations. When I tilted my head, he seemed to understand my confusion, as he went into an

explanation on the subject.

“You’re quite famous out at the East Branch. I mean, you were offered Labyrinth Subjugation after only a month. I’m sure that lot’s a gathering of notable adventurers from somewhere, is the rumor going around. Since I showed you around the first day, there are some going to me for information as well, is how it is. You’re earning me a pretty penny you know.”

Watching the narrow-eyed man who boldly declared he was selling information on me, my face cramped up. But my opponent saw through my sentiment.

“Don’t mind it. I didn’t give out anything too important. Though I did say you all looked like proficient ones. That’s all it took for a splendid income this month. Yep! As I thought, it sure is a nice thing when the adventurers I lead make it big!”

I stared at him in mild amazement.

“By the way, Lyle-kun.”

“Something the matter?”

When I stared at him a little longer, he raised both hands, in a pose of surrender.

“Don’t get angry. I really don’t have any major information on you guys, and all I did was answer what I was asked. More importantly, you’re going out to challenge the Labyrinth, right?”

“Yeah.”

I nodded.

“Then won’t you buy some info off of me?”

I hesitated a little to decide, but for the time being, I thought it best to listen to what he had to say.

“Well that depends on what you’ve got. So how much will it be?”

“Oh, you’ve already made me plenty, so a meal is enough. The truth is, I know a nice shop. The breakfast there has a bit of popularity.”

Meaning if I treated him to breakfast, he would give me information.

Even if I was going to go to the guild, I had some time on my hands, so I decided to buy the information off of him.

By the Sixth's【Search】, his response was stagnating at blue. I knew it best to remain vigilant, but at least listening to his story should be fine.

"Understood. My treat. That'll settle the matter, right?"

"Nice of you to be so understanding."

It was a restaurant that was crowded even from morning.

There were numerous customers who looked to be adventurers, many of them ordering steak and ale so early in the morning.

(It really is an adventurer-esque scene.)

Beim had its own Labyrinth it managed, and there were plenty of adventurers who challenged it. And spending their days in those dark twists and turns, some ended up returning at the break of dawn.

Because of that, there was an increase in the number or places open early to cater to them.

(It was like that in Arumsaas as well, and it's nothing too rare.)

The store itself was wide, and the tables in the chairs around were built sturdy.

The narrow-eyed man ordered something from the breakfast menu, and was currently eating it. I had already ate at the inn, so I only got a drink.

After I watched over his meal a while, he finished it up, wiped off his mouth, and started into the information in question.

"Now then, I've got to work off my keep. The fact you're challenging a Labyrinth means you're an adventurer approved by the guild. Well, even if your behavior's atrocious, as long as you've got some notable competence, they may offer the chance anyways, it seems, but most adventurers with that much ability choose to part from the

East Branch.”

In the Jewel, the Fourth put together the information coming from the man’s mouth.

『So even if they emphasize ability, they do consider humanity to an extent. You were recognized in quite a short time, so that’s what makes you stand out?』

The narrow-eyed man continued his explanation.

“You caused a problem soon as you got to Beim, didn’t you? That duel ruckus.”

“Yes.”

“The arbitrator in that one,【Creit Benini】was also selected for the Labyrinth Subjugation, it seems. It’s taken about half a year for him, but he’s a reputation for being diligent. In contrast, the party of that carouser【Albano】is also coming along. The truth is, those two came to Beim at around the same time.”

“What of it?”

He sipped his drink as he gave me a warning.

“They’re opposite types. Albano’s light-natured and shrewd. He used to head a bandit brigade, so he’s got some maneuverability, they say. In comparison, Creit’s party is truly sturdy, and battle oriented. But Albano’s the one with the knack, and he was decided for the next Labyrinth mission several months prior. Well, what I’m trying to say here, is that Creit holds some animosity towards the man, and Albano knows it all too well. He likes to tease him with it.”

From within the Jewel, the Seventh let his voice.

『… Then why were they sent on the same request? As I thought, the guild’s incompetent as ever.』

I felt the same.

If a problem broke out, it would bring trouble to me.

Narrow-eyes carried on.

“The main party are the knights led by【Alette Baillet】. They’re on a knight’s errantry at the moment, perhaps? They seem to have come for quite a tedious goal. They’ve got high battle ability, and possess considerable support. They’re quite skilled. Ah, the solo【Marina】’s participating too. There aren’t any other famous names among them.”

Hearing a solo adventurer was joining in, I found it a little strange.

“Challenging a Labyrinth when they’re alone? Do they possess some sort of special Skill?”

In general, it was rare for one to go solo. It’s not like there wasn’t support like Clara, who went around helping out a number of parties.

But it made me quite curious to find an adventurer offered to clear a Labyrinth was a solo.

“She’s quite strong. Exceptionally so. Perhaps you could call her a bit of a battle-crazed maniac?”

He laughed it off with the words, ‘hey, as long as you don’t do anything rude, she won’t do a thing,’ but I couldn’t laugh.

(Exceptionally? Celes level?)

I was curious of the adventurer Marina who was supposedly strong to such an extent. If it was possible, I’d definitely want her assistance.

“Alette’s set to be vice-captain of the knight brigade of some country, so she’s more on the commanding side of things. She’s the one responsible for this time’s forces. Well, it doesn’t seem she’s after the money, and she’s earnest, so she’s some considerable popularity among her coworkers.”

The information the man gave me was info pertaining to the members participating alongside my party.

Finishing his drink, he asked with a smile.

“So was that helpful?”

I answered.

“It was worth much more than a breakfast. Ah, this is a different matter, but there was something I wanted to ask.”

“What could it be?”

To him, I…

“You said you were an information dealer, but what sort of info can I buy? Like information on neighboring countries, or stuff like that? I want to get some details on them.”

And he shook his head.

“It’s not my main occupation after all. If it’s in the realm of rumors, I’ll probably know it, but I don’t have a guarantee. If you want to go information shopping, I can recommend a place. A to Z. If there are guys like me out there, I assure you there are some who do full-blown information enterprises. Naturally, it’s best you assume buying info from a real one’ll hike the price up a fine margin.”

So it’ll cost money after all. Thinking that, I took my cup in hands to take a sip. But it was already empty.

(So it won’t work out, for now. But if you look at it the other way, if I can do something about money, then I can have him introduce one.)

I spoke to the narrow-eyed man.

“Then once I’ve gotten to earning some money, please introduce a good one.”

Perhaps he thought I was joking. He shrugged his shoulders.

“Well fine. When you’re earning, that is.”

I took the check off of the table, and stood from my seat.

2 - Information Dealer

… A narrow alleyway of Beim.

Walking down it were Miranda and Shannon.

Shannon looked quite nervous, as she pressed on with a hand on the sleeve of Miranda's coat.

"Shannon, walk a bit faster."

"That's impossible. It's dirty, and this place… it's giving off quite a sense of danger, if you haven't noticed!"

Narrow and dark. Once they came to the end of that passageway, the entertainment district spread out before them. With the time being just before noon, there weren't too many people passing through.

Shannon looked around, collecting various bits of information with her demon eyes.

Those eyes themselves did not function, but in order to compensate for her lack of vision, she had manifested such a Skill.

Unlike her sister, her hair was a faint violet, and her irises amber.

"… Aren't we in the wrong place?"

There were a few women in showy garments, but they were walking around with drowsy expressions. Shannon could understand their fatigue, and she knew the people walking around were just going off to bed with the sun so high in the sky.

"And it reeks of ale…"

Shannon looked at a building's wall, and immediately averted her eyes. It was blatantly and naturally dripping with filth, and she felt she had just witnessed a different side of Beim.

(The difference between the pretty and the filth here is something

awful.)

Miranda walked on. Perhaps she had come here before, as she proceeded straight to her destination without a memo or map.

She went to enter a building of three stories.

(… Just what could be here?)

Rather than a shop, there was a compact counter like one would find at an office.

The opening of the door was followed by the chime of a bell attached to it, and a small girl peeked her face up from the desk. She looked to be even younger than Shannon.

While Shannon was surprised at finding a girl younger than she in the entertainment district, she found her sister's exchange with the girl even more intriguing.

"Innis, is Rauno in? I came for confirmation on that previous matter."

The girl named Innis nodded, and pointed deeper inside.

"He's further back. Said his head hurt from a drink too many. Even so, you've got a tag-along this time? Quite a cute one at that."

Shannon turned to the girl who looked younger than herself.

"No, no matter how you look at it, I'm the elder here."

Miranda spoke in a tired tone.

"Don't be stupid. Innis here's a gnome, and much older than you. Well then, we're going in. I'll drop the contingency fee with you later, Innis."

"Eh!?"

Shannon made a surprised sound, looking back and forth between the girl- a bit shorter than her- and her sister, as she was led further inside.

The moment she entered the back room, she was rocked by the

stench of alcohol.

“… Oh, you again.”

Unkempt hair, and an unshaven stubble.

The man was an acquaintance of Miranda, and after raising the upper half of his body, he scratched his head, and began to turn around.

Miranda confirmed the job she had requested.

“So what is the status on my request?”

The man stood, took an orderly pile of documents off a table further in, and handed them over to Miranda before sitting down on the sofa again.

The door opened, and the girl from before… Innis came bearing drinks. She left them on the table, so Shannon and Miranda sat on the sofa across, facing the man called【Rauno】.

By the time the girl had left, Miranda had begun looking through the papers.

Putting one of the cups to his mouth, Rauno looked at Shannon for only a moment. And he raised his guard a bit.

Shannon could understand that easily, but Miranda was the same.

“She’s my sister. You don’t have to be so wary.”

Rauno gave a bitter smile.

“Well sorry ‘bout that. I’m running a business here, and I just can’t help it. Not knowing something is quite scary, you know.”

He sounded as if he was joking, but he hadn’t relaxed one bit.

(This one’s somewhat more fearsome than he appears.)

He was definitely leading a no-good lifestyle, but his body was amply trained, and while he looked full of openings, he had yet to lower his guard.

“… So Novem met with an acquaintance in Beim? What was it she accepted?”

(Novem? Why is Miranda investigating…)

Rauno scratched his head, before letting his expression turn serious.

“That has yet to be determined, but she was holding it quite preciously. From the shape, it’s most probably a staff. What’s more, likely a Magic Tool at that. I wasn’t able to confirm it, so I didn’t record it down in those. Also, they seemed quite close. She called him her brother after all.”

As Miranda’s gaze sharpened, Rauno continued into Novem’s suspicious behavior.

“Rather than parting due to discord or anything, it was more of a which side do you want to follow sort of talk. The all-important Novem-chan in question said she’d tag along with dear Lyle-kun is how it went. Satisfied?”

Miranda laid the papers she finished reading on the table before going into the specifics.

“So her family has split into factions, yet he went through all the trouble to deliver a parcel?”

Rauno didn’t sound interested.

“Who knows? You’d be hard pressed to find decent folk among nobles. Just what could they be thinking… next we meet’ll be on the battlefield she said. Seriously, siblings killing off one another?”

Shannon felt the man react to the word noble. And after Miranda asked for a few more specifics, she stood from the sofa.

“Thank you. We’ll be away from Beim for a while, but perhaps I’ll bring in a request next we drop by. Also, the matter I entrusted to…”

Before she could finish.

“… I’ve gathered the info on the surrounding countries and Bahnseim already. At present, I haven’t gotten enough to count for what you’ve

paid, but you wanna look through it anyways?”

Miranda shook her head, and left. Rauno called to stop her.

“Oy, I’ll be troubled here if you don’t pay the fee. The promise was ten gold coins, right? It was quite a pain following that Novem-chan around.”

To his complaints, Miranda replied with a smile.

“Oh of course I’ll pay up. I’ll even throw in a bonus this time. But I’ll be handing it to Innis.”

“… Does it really make a difference, giving it to me or her?”

Shannon could see that Rauno was terribly disappointed inside. She understood he was a person one would call an information dealer, but she was surprised in finding he was skilled enough to trail Novem.

(And wait, why was I dragged here to begin with? Yes, I’m sure Novem is suspicious, but… is that really the first of our problems here?)

She couldn’t understand why her sister would put out ten gold for info on Novem. And she understood even less of why she had been brought to such a place.

After exiting the office, Miranda spoke so only Shannon could hear.

“Shannon, you’ve remembered the way here, have you not? Remember that Rauno-san. He’s a proficient one.”

“Eh? You mean…”

Without saying another word, Miranda walked off…

❼

… In a shop dealing with western clothing, Novem was shopping with Eva and May.

“Ah~ This one’s also nice. But I want that one too~.”

While Eva shifted through the merchandise, May looked over her with a fed-up expression.

“They’re all the same, aren’t they? All that differs is color, and what monster or animal skin they’re sewn out of, right?”

For May who looked quite cold in what she wore, they had come to buy a robe or coat. Eva was looking over other clothing along the way.

And Novem was accompanying the two of them.

Eva looked at May.

“That difference is the important part! What’s with you deciding at the drop of a hat without trying anything out? Are you sure you’re not the strange one here?”

May did not seem interested.

“I mean, I’m usually just naked, aren’t I? This garment is just something I wear because Fredricks once told me to properly cover up certain areas.”

May was a quilin, and her original form was that of a scaled horse. Recalling that fact, Eva still seemed dissatisfied, as she sent a glance at Novem to ask for assistance.

“May-san, if you plan on living by mingling with humanity, then you have to pay a level of awareness to your outward appearance.”

Told off by Novem, May reluctantly agreed.

“Fine, got it. But aren’t you taking too long to decide? Why would you even need an undergarment as small and insignificant as that? What purpose would it even serve?”

Eva to May.

“… To wear of course. And wait, could it be you’re…”

May nodded.

“Not wearing any, of course.”

Novem let out a sigh before she began picking out clothes for May. One of the salespersons came over.

From her slender build, high height, and the length of her ears, one could instantly tell she was an elf.

“Have you found everything you were looking for?”

Seeing one of her race come closer, Eva looked around.

“Yeah, sorry for that. Because I’m here, the other clerks won’t come over, will they.”

Elves were a demi-human race, and it was quite true there existed humans who persecuted them. And in truth, none of the human employees were drawing any closer.

But the elf salesperson…

“No, as you’d expect, those sorts of people are in small numbers in Beim. It’s just, I wonder what’s up with today. Um… it sure is a busy day.”

The surrounding employees did appear to be avoiding Novem’s group.

With a wry smile across his her face, the salesperson immediately attempted to change the topic. So Novem asked for some undergarments for May.

“Do you have any undergarments you think will suit this girl?”

Hearing that, with a smile…

“Leave it to me. I’ll have them chosen out in a jiffy. What price range would you be looking in?”

She answered Novem with quite a delighted tone…

Within the Jewel.

I had learned the【Warp】Skill from the Seventh.

“T-this is… a bit terrible.”

Gasping for breath, I looked back at the distance I had moved.

A Skill to instantly move a distance of a few meters. That was【Warp】.

It was the Seventh’s second stage, and like【Box】, a Skill that restrained the workings of space.

But it had its fill of problems.

First of all, the maximum distance it could move things was a few meters at present.

Second, even with my Mana, that was not possible consecutively.

Third, in complex terrain or locations, it would be exceedingly difficult to use it at a moment’s notice.

Looking over me, the Seventh looked quite happy.

『Oh don’t worry. Get the knack for it, and the distance’ll grow some. And understanding the terrain is easy enough if you leave it to the Second’s Skill.』

He was all smiles as he called it easy enough, but it was hard even with the Second’s. If I put some time into it, I do feel it’ll eventually grow easy.

But with the few meters it gave, it would be faster just to walk.

“For some reason, I’m getting the feeling my Mana will be left in the red if I use it just once or twice a day, though?”

When I said that, the Seventh nodded.

『You’ve got me there. It really does scrape you down to the bones. And you have the First’s Skill, so that one’s constantly saving Mana into itself. On top of that, Monica shares your Mana stream… you

sure have it rough. But with this one, you can easily breach the most secure of fortresses, you know?』

At present, the First Generation's final stage【Full Burst】was always storing up Mana for its next use.

And to maintain Monica, a line constantly sent Mana from me to her. Meaning even if I did absolutely nothing, I was in a state where I'd be losing Mana.

By the way, The Jewel absorbed up my Mana in quite a similar fashion.

"There are quite a few restraints, but now I can use Magic normally. I think I'll be fine standing on a normal battlefield."

When I said that, the Seventh made an earnest face.

『And trump cards are things to be saved up to te end. Even if you can only use them once. If you learn to use this one, you'll go up a few levels in ability.』

It really could become a trump card, but on top of the fatigue I felt after using it, there was the massive Mana consumption, and the minimal distance gained.

I learned it well and fine, but it will be quite hard to use in a real battle.

Among the Skills recorded in the Jewel, the Seventh's were- like the Third's- quite difficult to use.

Within the Jewel. In the Seventh's room of memories, I wiped off my sweat, and looked around.

Of the Ancestors' memories, his era was the one closest to mine, and quite a few of his scenes were ones I had seen before.

And out of all of them, for some reason, it wasn't in the mansion, but outside old Zell's house that I was receiving training.

Even when he lived on the premise in order to manage the vast expanses of land owned by the estate, I still find it a wonder why he

never got a room in the house.

“Seventh, why didn’t you lend out one of the mansion’s room to Zell?”

There, he scratched his face with the tip of his finger.

『… He wanted a place he could relax. Even if it was just an illusion, if we didn’t have a place we could take a breather, we’d never have made it. At times, I’d come here for a good drink with Zell too.』

So he did something like that? I looked at the small house.

The scene changed, and my surroundings turned to night. In the small house, the Seventh and old Zell were emptying their glasses. Zell’s wife finished cooking, and brought over some more ale.

『He raced across the battlefield, and worked for my sake. Back when I had just took over, he was the man who moved as my retainer.』

Listening to the Seventh’s nostalgia, I remembered Celes’ words. And she seemed to know it was because of Zell I was able to inherit the Jewel.

『He served his duty up to the very end, and yet my own granddaughter… let’s end it here, Lyle.』

The Seventh’s despondent words moved me back to the conference room with the round table at its center.

❼

Morning.

As it was a vacation day, I woke up a little later than usual. I stretched, got off of the bed, and opened up the room’s window.

The world outside was a major metropolis, and fitting to its scale, the people were already moving about with quite some vigor.

“Now then, let’s get all the necessary things together today.”

I had confirmed what would be needed with the Guild, and asked how long it would be expected to take.

It seems they would at least prepare carts for transport, and consumables to an extent. We had to assemble our equipment, and whatever other items we thought would be necessary.

“I distributed the required funds, so all that’s left is my own equipment.”

I turned my eyes to my equipment lying in the room. Scabbards attached to a belt, with sabres filling their holes.

The two sabres were the spares I had prepared before coming to Beim. I did circle around the shops dealing in weapons, but none of their merchandise settled quite right with me.

A few fine ones around, but those had a fine price tag stuck onto them.

In that case, I would probably end up buying one of the mass produced ones, but if it came down to that, the ones I already owned would work well enough, so there wasn’t a need to buy any.

Up to now, they’ve held up one way or another, so I’d been postponing replacing out my gear.

A knock sounded.

“Monica? You can come in.”

I confirmed who was at the door with the【Search】Skill, and approved their entry. It was still locked, but Monica quite naturally entered as if there was nothing on it at all.

“Hmm, to possess a perverse nature so great you can sense I, Monica, no matter how separated we may be… I cannot help but find myself surprised every time. At this rate, perhaps I should just offer up my body and heart to you. Oh right, I’ve already done that, my dear.”

I let the latter half of that slide, and spoke to her.

“We’re going shopping today. At the very least, we have to be prepared for a week or two. There are cases where they take units of months, so we’ll have to be considerably prepared. I’ll make an ingredient and consumable list, so let’s go ask everyone what they’ll need.”

It’s at times like these that Beim is convenient.

A large stream of merchandise flowed through it, and you could assemble goods before you know it.

“… Please care about me more. You’ve gotten some more women lately, so you’re dealing with me less and less. It’s terrible. You won’t even feed the fish you’ve already reeled in, oh god damn master of mine!? But I’ll still serve such a hopeless man. I mean, that’s me… that’s Monica!”

She shook up her twin tails, and began a play all by herself. I left her aside, and got my clothing in order.

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): “… In the end, it is the smaller chest that reigns supreme. Flat is JUSTICE! Our differences with the plot faction are irreconcilable.”

【Interlude】Ancestors and Wives

【Interlude】Ancestors and Wives

※This is an interlude. It holds no bearing on the main story
Completely separate from the storyline.
Here you will find the reason the Ancestors' wives do not appear.

-Chapter 1-

-Meeting the Ancestors in the Jewel Arc-

Staying in an inn of a lodging town, I abided the voices streaming into my head, and left the room.

I looked around and found a chair in the hall.

So I sat there and decided to waste some time.

(Somehow, I've been getting terribly tired lately.)

I lost to my sister Celes, and was driven out of my home, the Walt House. Even now, I'm being saved by my former fiancé Novem.

(I'm really sleepy…)

So sitting in the creaking misshapen wooden chair, I closed my eyes.

❼

『Wake up, 'ya bastard!』

"Eh, w… what?"

I heard an angry voice, so I opened my eyes, and looked around.

In front of me was a large circular table, with a round blue stone

embedded in the center. Around it were fourteen chairs that gave off a similar feel, and there, various men and women sat side by side.

Only my seat was alone, without another stationed beside.

Across from me, with a beast's fur covering his head, a man who looked like a barbarian from all angles was glaring at me.

『Just look at those dead fish eyes on your face! And now, that frail physique and mopesome temperament… and you call yourself a man of the Walt House!? Listen here, the Walt House's selling point is the wildness of… OOF!』

The man in his thirties who had begun to yell was shut up by the fist of a woman in her later twenties.

Those around looked at the beaten man with indescribable emotion.

Holding his head, he turned to the woman.

『U-um, you know, that was just to give my poor descendant some motivation, and it's not like I'm actually angry or anything… I'm not, so…』

With her curling hair done up in a ponytail, the woman lifted the man up by the collar, and shut him up with a strong blow to the body.

(… Eh? What's all this?)

There, the woman sitting adjacent to me stood, and embraced me.

『You've grown so big… Lyle, do you remember me?』

Taking in the woman's features, I was surprised. Because she resembled my grandmother enough to warrant such surprise. But her age was somewhere in her later twenties.

And my grandmother had long passed.

"Yes, but… that's…"

When I fidgeted around, the ponytailed woman looked at me, and laughed.

『Hahaha, you're quite a cute one. I never thought my descendent would turn out to be such a cool man. I'm surprised this man's House managed to pop out a boy like you.』

My grandmother clinging to me glared at the other woman.

『… Hey wait a minute. It's my blood that Lyle carries. Meaning he legitimately carries the blood of royalty. You say it as if you're so high and mighty, but what do the knight couple have to say for themselves?』

A vein popped up on the ponytailed woman's forehead as she refuted

『Ah? How cheeky for one so younger than me. In the first place, if I wasn't here, then none of those here would have ever gathered. You understand that, right? Look, you say something too.』

The ponytailed woman turned the conversation to the couple-like people to her side. Looking closely, it looks like all the pairs were spouses.

A man in hunter attire…

『No, um… mom, how about we calm down a little. See, our descendent Lyle over there looks quite troubled.』

But his woman was different.

『I've been wanting to say this for quite some time, but…』

Touching her straight and long emerald hair, the woman beside the hunter spoke.

『… Dear mother in law, your soup was definitely too strongly seasoned.』

…. Um, what's this all about?

On top of being completely irrelevant to the topic at hand, the emerald-haired woman looked quite relieved after the words had left her mouth.

The hunter man tried to follow up.

『Oy, that's a bit off. No one was asking about that, right!?』

『So what!? I never got to say it up to the end, so let me have my moments! Saying it was the taste of the Walt House, and never calling her out on how terrible it was is your fault, you know!』

The ponytailed woman snapped her fingers as she glared at the hunter, and the woman to his side.

『Hmm… so that's what you thought? How sad. Now Crassel how about you tell that woman who passes water for soup the truth?』

It appears that the ponytailed woman was the hunter's mother. Appearance-wise, the hunter-dressed man looked a little older, so it was a peculiar sight.

My grandmother clinging to me offered an explanation.

『It must have been hard for you, Lyle. But don't worry. Everyone here is an ancestor of the Walt House… I doubt they'll be much use, honestly, but they have Skills, so I'm sure you'll find a use for them.』

A younger form of my grandfather stood, and spoke to grandmother.

『O-oy! You shouldn't be telling him things like that! Of the members of history, there are plenty who've excelled in military service. Come to think of it…』

The one to assert their opinion to my grandmother was a woman sitting beside a man who looked quite unconcerned with the situation.

Standing up besides the man of smaller build, she looked towards us.

『You call yourself royalty, but you're the cause of all this, aren't you? Are you listening, Lyle-kun? The Jewel that woman brought with her when she married in is the cause of all of this.』

The unconcerned man gave a slight nod.

『… Right. And wait, what's this about royalty?』

Unable to understand anything, I looked around.

(Um, you've lost me.)

An aloof man came in-between the ponytailed woman and the emerald haired one.

『Grandmother, mother, how about we leave it at that? Alright? A request from me.』

Hearing that, the two of them reluctantly stood down. The man's wife…

『You always just play everything off like that… you really have a knack for it. Even when Max went through so much troubles because of you. Right, Max? You got that strong-willed shorty as your bride, and Fredricks went astray…』

A man wearing glasses broke into a cold sweat as he looked around nervously. A woman of small build slammed both her hands on the table, and stood.

『Oh shut it! I did my best as daughter of a viscount! What's all this!? What do you mean my Fredricks went astray!?』

The unconcerned man tried to keep up his indifferent air as he fidgeted.

『M-mama, I'm begging you, please stop. Oy, dad!』

He seemed tough on his father, but the glasses-wearing man…

『What are you expecting me to do!? I don't think I can go against either of them. How about you act like father, and try calming everyone down!?』

『Don't screw with me, damn old man!』

When they started fighting, the woman of short build also started grappling with the belligerent one.

With a large body, a man who gave off a wild impression at a glance looked at me.

But he was trying to shrink that large body of his, as he remained conscious of the woman sitting to her side.

The pretty woman of blond hair and blue eyes gave off a bit of a cold impression in her dress.

『You sure are loud. Good grief, this is why I hate far out country-side nobles.』

『No, you also lived there, right? Saying it like that is…』

When the wild-ish man said that, the woman glared at him.

『Oh shut it, you liar! What do you mean you fell head over heels for me!? Surrounded by other women… in the first place, getting women just because father in law told you to… you've got no individuality, you know!』

The wild man looked towards the man of small build for help.

『… No, I said it was fine to get mistresses, but that's only if you think there'll be a problem with succession. I never told you to push yourself and get a number, did I?』

When the wild-ish man hung his head, my grandfather spoke to the woman.

『Mother, can we leave it there? Lyle's watching.』

She looked at me.

I straitened my back in tension.

『Oh, looking at you up close, you really are cute. I'm sure you'll make women cry in a different way than that man. Hey, listen Lyle… make sure you don't turn out like him, alright?』

Being looked at with such lightless eyes, I ended up nodding several times.

My grandmother clinging to me spoke.

『More importantly Lyle, it's about Novem, but…』

"Eh? Yes?"

『That girl's quite shady, don't you think? It's you know… my intuition

is whispering to me.』

“Um, but you see. She did choose to go along with me. And I haven’t even decided what to do from here on, so I don’t think…”

『Oh no worries there!』

My grandmother separated from me, and spread her arms.

『There are fourteen gathered here! With their Skills and stages put together, you’ve got【Fourty Two Skills】for the picking! While we’re at it, want to try taking the country? I hate the current royal line, so I’ll support you with all I’ve got. Right, dear?』

When my grandmother looked at him, my grandfather averted his eyes.

『Y-yeah… I’m sure a country or two is simple enough… but what about this country’s history, or just cause or…』

He began mumbling in a quiet voice. My grandmother put her hand to her back, and I’m not sure where she produced it from, but she took out her favorite folding fan.

『What is it? With all the men of the Walt House gathered here, you can’t even take a single country? What a letdown. All the history of the House sung of as Bahnseim’s strongest, and that’s all you’ve got.』

Holding his stomach, the barbarian man stood.

『Wai- wait a second. Look here, right now, that boy doesn’t have a single soldier, so how do you plan on going about taking a country?』

When he stated something surprising logical, the men displayed off their lack of motivation.

『Right. I don’t want to agree with my dad, but picking a fight with a country is a bit…』
『It sounds like a pain. Let’s just run off somewhere, and reclaim some more land.』
『Ah, I’m good at making money, you know.』
『Let’s get some animals aboard. Cute ones!』

『No, I'm sorry, so please forgive me.』
『My position was councilor to that very royal line, though.』

One of them was earnestly apologizing to his wife. The others didn't seem interested in toppling the reigning power. But the wives of the female camp had differing opinions.

They were all for it.

『Oh, nice! My blood shall take down the royal line of Bahnseim, and become kings… I'm on board!』
『If you use the Skills of everyone gathered here, it'll be over before you know it.』
『We got from knight to count, so a little leap to king isn't bad. And wait, that royal line can go to hell already. My husband's death was definitely that bastard's fault… Introduced a wife and so what? Pushing all the trouble on us after that…』
『Wonderful! Let's show the descendants of that disgusting king a thing or two!』
『How much do you think my husband suffered… I won't forgive Celes for making all his efforts be for nothing! And I've not a shred of loyalty for the royalty that abandoned all its provincial nobles! Dear, let's do it.』
『… It'll be just right to blow off some stress. You're doing it, right dear?』
『There are houses we have good enough relations with. There are plenty of nobles with dissatisfactions against the royalty. It's fine, we will give you the throne, Lyle.』

No, rather than wanting to get anything like that…

"U-um… I couldn't even win against Celes…"

The Barbarian-styled man.

『That's why you're no goo… Bherah!』

After the pony tailed woman sent him flying to shut him up, the other woman began negotiations with their husbands.

Pleading, and occasionally threatening, and with sticking cynicism, they received the permission of the men.

And all I could do was watch it go on…

My grandmother spoke.

『Now, Lyle… let's start our regime.』

"U-um…"

After it went on that far, I started to hear Novem's voice.

❼

"Lyle-sama, you'll catch a cold if you sleep in a place like this."

Having washed her hair and wiped down her body, Novem looked at me with ample worry.

My eyes were teary, as I held her body to my own.

"W-what could be the matter, Lyle-sama!?"

As she panicked, I spoke.

"What should I do, Novem… it seems I'm going to be overthrowing the government."

"… Huh?"

Even Novem was struck dumbfound by my words.

How was it?

It won't get anywhere. With fourteen in the Jewel… the main story won't get anywhere! And I can't deal with as many Skills as the meaning of life.

3 - The Leader's Job

Godwin: Rebranding is where you take a property the general public are bored to death of seeing, change it slightly, and promote it as something completely different.

Jack: That sounds both insulting, and manipulative.

Godwin: I like to call it good marketing.

Jack: Well now I think it sounds great.)

The Leader's Job

Adventuring companions. The leader heading a party generally had a lot of worries.

When the scale grew large enough, perhaps you could hire people to manage in your place, but you couldn't really leave your money to people you couldn't trust.

In my own room, I looked over the consumables list Monica had requested from our members, and began to write a list of things we had to buy.

"Um~, we can get these as a party, so the remaining problem is Aria after all. That's definitely something she needs to get herself. And wait, she's the only one who'll be using it, isn't she?"

Her equipment replacement included, Aria was flat broke. I knew she liked circling around the food stalls, but that was still within my tolerance level.

But I have to manage it before she begins earning debt from out other companions, and bringing about a bad influence to the party.

Not just myself, as the leader, I have to look after my party members as well. Meaning, I had no free time.

"Tomorrow is shopping with Miranda, next is Clara, and Aria is…"

On top of interacting with all my companions…

Watching over me was a woman gripping her twin tails with both hands. I ignored Monica as she made a bored expression.

She was by my side helping in various things, but whenever she grew bored, she would start making some nerve-wracking gestures. At present, she was sitting facing away, quietly singing a sorrowful song to attract my attention.

“… Monica, if we assemble all of these, then how will we be budget-wise?”

When I called out to her, she stood and abruptly raised both her hands.

“Over budget. To be more specific, it’ll be around ten gold over! As of yet, it’s unknown what sort of earnings we can expect in the Labyrinth, so if you increase the budget any higher, you’d best be prepared to go into the red! But, with a certain chicken dickwad’s savings taken into consideration, it’s a trifling sum.”

Even if we were accepting requests, it’s not like as long as I could mobilize our forces, then any job would be fine. It was the leader’s job to stay in the black.

“I’m more than resolved to face a deficit, but going onto those funds is a bit…”

For the task before us, no amount of money would ever be enough, and I thought it terrible if I didn’t get a grip on the matter. Some advice came from the Jewel.

It was one with strong relation to monetary matters, the Fourth.

『You seem to be troubled it, but Lyle… you know, it’s not like you have to be at full force at all times.』

When I touched the Jewel, he offered an explanation.

『I’m saying you don’t always have to make use of all your numbers. Send a moderate force to the Labyrinth, and let two or three sit this one out. It’s your holiday, and you don’t really have to challenge it in

the first place. Based on how things play out, just take two or three along. At the moment, you have assembled personnel capable of such a feat.』

While we were low in numbers, my party's specialty was the high competence of each of its members.

『Marching forth with everyone aboard is overkill. Do some moderate rotations, and preserve your war potential for the future. And that'll also decrease the consumption of consumables.』

But wouldn't it be best to let everyone build up experience equally? I had such a worry, but its true we wouldn't be able to move without money.

However…

(There's the matter of Novem and Miranda, and rotating to try out a variety of formations may prove beneficial. And wait, besides those two, are there any that don't get along?)

Thinking it wasn't a bad idea to use this chance to find out, and with this being my first Labyrinth Subjugation mission in Beim, I felt there was a need for some extensive trial and error.

I sent Monica a glance.

"How's the mini Porter for Clara's personal use coming along? Feel it'll be done soon?"

Monica pointed both palms upwards, and shrugged her shoulders.

"I couldn't borrow a workshop, so it really will be a simple thing. Just a box with legs and wheels. A handcart or perhaps a rickshaw. I have one unit completed."

We received some details on the Labyrinth, and it seems it wasn't spacious enough to fit Porter. Even if we forced it through, it would not be able to descend stairs.

And it wouldn't make the turns on the path, or so Monica calculated.

(It we'll be fighting in a narrow space, smaller numbers really will be

the safer option.)

Originally, I planned to split the party in half, and have us move separately, but it was dangerous to leave Shannon at the Base alone.

"… Monica, tell everyone we'll be challenging the Labyrinth on rotation. I'll draw up the plans on my side…"

When I said that, the Fifth gave some advice from the Jewel.

『… Get all their opinions together. And don't finalize it alone. You can reuse some tools each round, so gather up all the necessary items, and tell everyone today. Have a meeting. Otherwise it will be a pain later.』

I had the Seventh's【Box】, so it was possible to preserve perishables. The reason my party could travel with so little luggage was due to that oh-so-convenient Skill of the Seventh.

When I shook my head, Monica waited for my next words.

"… Never mind that. Let's buy all the necessary items today. But we'll discuss the matter of rotations with everyone. Can you tell everyone to gather in the evening?"

Monica nodded.

"Quite a wise choice for a chicken. Well, there are some of them who've gone out, so perhaps informing everyone will prove impossible."

When I thought of who may be out, Miranda's face was the first to come to mind. The runner ups: Novem, Eva and May.

May was taking in the sights of the city, and Novem was accompanying her as something of a legal guardian.

(Clara will be holed up reading since she's bought a book, Aria doesn't get up in the mornings, Shannon's location… well, that one really depends on Miranda.)

"Just tell them once they've returned. I'm sure they'll be back by

night, so… actually, could you go out and tell them? We can go shopping once you get back.”

When I said that, her face reddened.

“I-it’s not like I wanted to go out with you or anything, okay!? I’ll convey the message as fast I can, but don’t misunderstand it! It’s not because I want to go shopping with you as soon as possible, okay!?”

She said something along those lines.

(Why does she act like that every single time?)

“Then I can go alone and…”

As I was about to say it, Monica’s face turned serious.

“That was a lie. I’m ridiculously happy. If you don’t take me along, I’ll nag you to death about it later. It will surely be annoying, so I highly recommend you take me along for your own sake. Just take me dammit, I beg of you. I’ve been looking forward to it for a hell of a long time.”

“No… you’re already being plenty annoying as it is…”

And the Sixth offered some advice.

『Lyle, don’t forget to give your greetings to the other important members of this subjugation mission.』

(Ah, there was that too.)

❼

A few days later.

I took care of my comrades’ preparations, and when I had the time to enjoy my day off, I walked to an place I didn’t usually go with some bottles of wine in one hand.

I got the narrow eyed man to introduce me to the one leading this

Labyrinth Subjugation,【Alette Baillet】.

Of course, he wasn't a direct acquaintance, but I asked if he could use some connections to make our meeting a possibility.

If the woman in question didn't want to meet, then it's natural I wouldn't be able to offer my greetings. But with me having been recognized by the guild in such a short timeframe, it seemed she was mildly interested.

She approved a meeting, and so I got to bring my feet to her door.

(She should have just refused.)

The reason I thought that, was because she had just returned from completing a request. As the party's leader, she had personally gone out to complete it, and after just returning, she'd have to exchange pleasantries with me.

I really don't know about inviting in guests when if she wanted to take it easy a while.

At the same time, my schedule was also barely able to fit it in.

I told my members about rotating in the Labyrinth, and received their approval, but in that case, what were we to do about the reward? The formation? Breaks? Various problems began to surface, and tuning based on everyone's input was a trial.

(I'm glad I listened to what the Fifth had to say.)

As I was thinking that, I arrived at the building I was looking for.

The area was lined with manors, and other buildings that looked like inns. And It was an area a large number of adventurers lived.

Rather than staying in an inn, or renting an apartment, the ones living in places like this must be on the successful side of the spectrum.

A small fraction lived ridiculously extravagant lives, but it wasn't too rare for a large party to rent out a building either.

"This is the place."

I approached the door, and was about to knock it, when the slider covering the wide peephole in the door suddenly slid open.

From it, the two eyes inspecting were like the eyes of a beast that had found its prey. Those violet eyes looked a little scary.

“Whah!”

They’d likely sensed my approach, and sought to deal with me preemptively. But I didn’t really enjoy this way of being dealt with.

(I should have prepared my heart a bit more.)

Is what I thought, but the door opened before my mouth could.

“H-huh?”

While the events had left me in shock, the one to come out the woman with blond bob-cut hair that fell just short of reaching her shoulders. Her age looked to be just around the range you could include in the twenties, or higher, or not.

And walking out, she expanded her arms…

“Welcome, pretty boy! And jump into my arms if you will! Ah, while you’re at it, could you sign these forms? Me and my assets: a limited time offer! Oh, even if you call me a noble, I’m but a fourth daughter. However, you’ll never be bothered with making ends meet, I assure you! What’s more, I’ve not even been used ye…”

I won’t let you escape! She said, as she sent me a wink. While she did have some charm to her, she was a person that gave off a bit of an unfortunate impression, and she was desperately clenching the papers in her hand with the word marriage written over the top.

From within, her comrades were holding her back.

“Captain Alette! I beg of you, please don’t go outside! We’ll take care of this, so don’t show yourself in public anymore! Even I’m beginning to feel embarrassed here!”

“Stop it, won’t you? Don’t get in the way of my happy marriage! Even like this, I still search for my prince on a white horse. I’m a

pure maiden inside! By the way, outside, I'm also a pure mai…"

"Yes, enough of that! Even if you're a maiden inside, your outside's just barely still of marriageable age! Just get back inside already… and wait, who the hell was it!? Who let the captain out of her room!"

The woman being pulled back by a number of men let off a refreshing smile.

"Ain't no one in this world who can bind me. But if you're going to use the ball and chains of a ring, I highly welcome it."

Her comrades spoke to me.

"… Normally, she's a splendid captain. I assure you."

I dropped the three wine bottles I had brought along as a gift onto the ground, and covered my face with both hands.

"A woman I don't even know is breaking my heart."

From the Jewel, the Third let out an uninterested voice.

『Hmm, our mr. lyle must surpass that one day. Look up to the pros; our mr. lyle must always be aiming for the top.』

The Seventh.

『Even the Walt House's Wonder Child would be hard pressed to surpass that one through ordinary means.』

These guys are enjoying it… this is the worst.

My instincts understood.

That this person was yet another victim of after-Growth syndrome.

Her comrades frantically surrounded her, and dragged her into the building. I heard they were knights from some land, but there was a sense of uniformity among their garments.

The knight to come out in the captain's place was a tired-looking one, wiping his brow and getting his hair in order as he patted down his clothing.

“P-please to meet you. You must be Lyle-dono, right?”

I decided to pretend none of that ever happened, and deal with him normally.

“Yes. The coming Labyrinth Subjugation is to be my first one, so I thought it best I gave my greetings. Ah, these are a gift.”

“… Thank you.”

I couldn’t really determine whether that sincere gratitude was directed at the wine, or at me letting the previous scene slide.

But I could definitely understand that I came at a bad time.

“Um, today, I really did just come to give a greeting, so if I may, I think I will be taking my leave.”

“Ah, of course. Uh, if possible, could you…”

I could understand what he wanted to say. So I silently nodded.

“I haven’t seen a thing. I haven’t heard a thing.”

The man to me.

“Thank you. Truly, thank you.”

And said that.

The Fourth in a subdued voice.

『So you really did just end it at getting to know each other’s faces. Even when you prepared the finest of wines.』

The Sixth.

『Well, you got to see an embarrassing side of her, and completed your objective of getting acquainted. It wasn’t all negatives. No, more so, you may have gained something.』

The Third too.

『It was the best of times. Hey, next you meet, try asking if she always goes around carrying that document she was holding

before!』

The Fifth.

『Looks like marriageable age has extended beyond my time. And wait, a noble daughter, at that age to boot, makes me even begin to suspect defective merchandise.』

The Seventh as well.

『Luck wasn't with her, is one thing. But she's a holder of competency to put her up at future vice-head? Is that so… isn't that fine, then?』

The Sixth agreed.

『Splendid. Truly wonderful. Now then, the problem is how to make use of this, but…』

They sounded to be plotting something sinister. My ancestors.

(These guys are scary.)

❼

After having successfully (?) completed my greetings, I left the building inhabited by Alette Baillet's party, and looked around the area as I walked.

It wasn't rare for successful adventurers to have a stronghold in Beim. I there were adventurers that owned mansion-like complexes, there were also parties that preferred the functionality of an inn.

(It increases our expenses, so I'll have some piece of mind if we can have a stronghold somewhere. Even if I want to have Monica make something, it would be nice to have a warehouse where we could do something about the sound.)

Our current members were comrades who had decided to follow me. Borrowing an apartment, and living there would be fine, but I'm not really sure what to think of that.

(Perhaps it would be best to make it as showy as possible. And

wait, that would cost money by definition… Labyrinth missionss have a nice prospect of profit, and I'll be able to find out just how they work this time around.)

As a leader, there was much I had to think about.

At times like this, I think it would be easier if I could just move as a single party member. And at the same time…

(That Novem… she's been speaking up less as of late. Is she relying on me? Or perhaps…)

She used to be moving various things for my sake, but after that case with Celes, I felt a distance had been created.

I could think of it as being recognized, and my decisions trusted, but it did feel a little lonely.

(… It's best I went and spoke with Novem about it. She does do quite a bit or my sake.)

The reason I didn't press her too hard may have been that I didn't want to be hated by her.

And it's not like I was the only one stretching things out. The ancestors… especially the Third, and Fourth were particularly for it.

The other ancestors did more or less have their doubts about Novem of the Forxuz House, but they didn't tell me to try any press her for answers.

That must be just how deeply they were intertwined with the Walt House. Even those that treated them as vassals likely never thought they would ever turn coat.

(Come to think of it, the Forxuz House sure is a strange one. The first did say they used to be neighbors or something.)

The Second, and the Third, and even the Fourth had relied on them. Enough that it's been said it was never the throne, but to the Walt House the Forxuzes had sworn loyalty to.

(I really do have to have a proper talk with her…)

On the way home, I began to feel unwell. Is it something I shouldn’t be asking? I felt a sense of unease in my chest.

4 - The Departing Subjugatory Force

The preparations to depart over with, we gathered at Beim's eastern gate. Our scale was that of a few hundreds.

It didn't reach a thousand, but it was still a considerable number.

(I heard the difficulty level was low, but…)

The largest individual party was Alette Baillet's knights. They had a bit over thirty fighters, and only around the same number of support.

But perhaps they hadn't had enough supporters to begin with, as a few of them were temporary hires.

Among the other parties, even the bigger ones had around six fighters, and ten support. My party was not the smallest one.

If you want to pick out the absolute smallest party, then it was the lightly armored party led by that【Albano】the narrow eyed man had spoken of. While they borrowed a horse-drawn wagon all the same, they only had six in all.

【Creit Benini】who'd stirred up that duel mess, headed a group of six armored men organized by the books, and a greater number to support them.

They had four wagons, and while their equipment was mismatched, they looked like an army on a march. No, I participated in an army's march back in centrally, and ability-wise, these men were greater.

Looking around, I saw some irrelevant parties gathering as well.

"What, so you can just join in if you want to?"

When I thought that, the receptionist dispatched by the Guild walked up to this time's commander- Alette-san.

It was Tanya-san.

I had finished checking over the goods packed into Porter, so I somewhat paid mind to their exchange.

We had come quite early in the morning, so our group was somewhere around the center of the mass. For that sake, Porter was one thing, but the gathering of women also stood out.

Among the other adventurers, one even remarked, ‘thinking of opening shop once we arrive there?’ of something as he held up hie head indecently.

It seems it takes a variety of sorts to make a Labyrinth subjugation in Beim.

(I think I’m getting something wrong here, but… oh, they started talking.)

The voices I heard were cut off by the surrounding noise, so it’s not like I could pick up everything. But what I did catch was…

“Well then, those are all the regulars who’ll be participating this time.”

“… That was a big help, Tanya.”

“You don’t look so good. Something the matter, Alette-san? Ah, right! The truth is, there’s a party I recommended among them, so once you get back, can you tell me how they fared?”

“… I don’t really mind? What name should I look out for?”

“His party stands out, so you’ll pick them out quite easily. That boy with the blue hair watching from over there, Lyle-kun’s party.”

It does appear she noticed my eavesdropping.

And when Alette-san looked in my direction, her face turned pale. I waved, and Tanya-san reciprocated the motion with a smile.

Alette-san hung her head, and put her hands over it.

Once the paperwork had finished, Tanya-san came over to me.

Watching Alette-san escape into the crowd to intentionally disappear

from my field of vision, I was overcome with some indescribably sentiment.

(Right. It's hard because you remember every little bit of it… I totally get it. I totally get where you're coming from, Alette-san.)

From within the Jewel, the Third's voices sounded like he was desperately holding back laughter.

『Hey, Lyle… make sure you properly ask whether she carries those papers around regularily. How about asking her outright if she's found any takers yet!?』

(… The Third somehow feels the darkest here.)

I offered my greetings to Tanya-san who approached.

"Good morning. So you noticed me?"

"You do possess quite a conspicuous means of transportation. And wait, not a carriage, but a Porter, was it? I never thought you would be in possession of a model of the item so talked about of Arumsaas."

As everyone directed their glances at Porter, Monica stuck out her chest in pride.

While doubting whether anyone was actually praising her, I continued talking to Tanya-san.

"Come to think of it, what's this about regular members?"

"Eh? Oh, that? Right, you wouldn't be knowledgeable about something like that. It's your first subjugation, so perhaps it would be best to familiarize yourself with the way things go."

What Tanya-san explained…

Apart from the Parties specifically selected to join, those Parties could hire other ones or soloes as temporary assistance.

For those that scraped by with the bare minimum numbers, it was common to hire some more adventurers for added support.

Of course, there were other cases around, and it was no good unless you could trust the temps you were hiring.

But even if we knew that fact beforehand, it would be quite difficult for us to hire anyone in only a week's timespan.

"Besides adventurers, there are merchants who make the trip a well. People going the same general direction will accompany partway as well, and there are even some performing troupes. See, just look over there."

Looking closely, I saw a gathering of elves confirming their instruments.

They were quite a distance away, so I hadn't noticed.

(They have weapons as well, so I thought they were Adventurers.)

I observed around, and saw some merchants leading several cart's-worth of merchandise. Dressed-up women were sociably looking around from them.

So among them, some would open up shops, and cater to the adventurers.

Other than that, there were some young adventurers who'd likely pleaded with another party to take them along.

"It's a limited time thing, and a small town forms around it for a period of time. I'm sure entertainment is a must. While we're moving, the temporary hires will carry out the guard duties after all. The regular members can challenge the Labyrinth with all they've got."

"But the temps aren't permitted to enter it?"

Tanya-san spoke with a wry smile.

"I'm not sure if a receptionist such as myself should be the one to say it, but I've no idea what's happening where I'm not watching. There are a few guild personnel who will tag along, but I myself will return to the East Branch once I've confirmed the participants. It's best you see how those matters go on your own."

As I accepted that it was just something like that, Tanya-san went on.

“Normally, doing temp work like this is an important task to get connections with competent people. And remember, your party is a competent one.”

“… Just now, you told Alette-san, that you’re the one that recommended us.”

When I said that, she nodded.

“Yes, so make sure you don’t betray my expectations.”

She said that with a smile, before walking off to confirm the members of the other parties.

❼

… The group that departed arrived at their destination with Alette’s Party at the head.

Miranda began to understand the meaning of Tanya’s words as she walked around the base.

(It truly is a small town here. I can’t believe it.)

At the start, it was just a group of under a thousand, but given the time, people continued to gather, and its population easily crossed that line.

After a while of moving, those with separate destinations separated off.

And in the end, the number to reach their destination point after six days of travel was just around six hundred.

The difficulty level wasn’t high. But with a scale surpassing ten floors, and a boss every floor, it was thought it would take quite some time.

The parties actively doing the clearing contained around one hundred

and fifty members.

A force carrying around numbers several times that was based on a different methodology that the usual subjugatory forces of knights and soldiers.

After arriving, the guild personnel immediately began to confirm that everyone was present.

And the magicians brought along began to build the base.

They leveled the earth, built up walls, and formed the roads.

Just as Tanya had said, a town was really formed.

And as soon as they arrived, the merchants unloaded their cargo, they split up into those to stay, and those to return, many heading back with adventurer guards.

There was more cargo on the way, but when she asked, she heard another merchant party was on their way. They would arrive a few days later.

Miranda was curious as to what the merchants were thinking in planning it like that, but her information source gave a vague smile, and dodged the topic.

The goods on sale leaned most towards armor, wine, and food. Items made to last a long time.

Some had brought ingredients to cook in stone furnaces built up with magic.

After distributing luggage to the important member, the guild receptionists went off to their prepared tent, and began handling paperwork.

They had horses prepared, and it was clear they would be getting in contact with the guild regularly.

While Miranda walked her way back to the place her party had been afforded, a number of adventurers immediately made their way to the tents of the harlots.

“Hey, ain’t five silver too steep? How’s three sound?”

To the haggling adventurer, the man taking around the girls smiled.

“Sir, we’ve also risked our lives to come to these distant lands to do business. There’s no harm in making it a little expensive. And we’ve only brought around the best of the best.”

The adventurer did not back down.

“Quit lying! Coming this far with an army to guard you, and you can’t be going there, buddy!”

But the man.

“Then so be it. We’ll merely tend to other customers. And as we’ve just arrived, we haven’t even finished setting up shop. If you help out, I won’t mind making it just a little lighter on your wallet.”

A few fleeting glances from the man, and the adventurers voiced their willingness to help with construction and other work.

When she turned her eyes to a different place, a troupe of performers were singing their songs, and playing their tunes.

“It sure is lively here.”

When she said that, a voice called over.

“Well of course it is. When an adventurer’s earning money, then so are the merchants and craftsmen and harlots. We’re not earnest enough to fight days on end without any entertainment.”

When she turned around, she say a blond-haired man with slackened eyes. At his waist hung a one-handed sword with a conspicuously long hilt.

Lightly armored, and giving off the aura of a womanizer at but a glance. Miranda dealt with him with a smile.

“What business do you have with me?”

He also greeted her smiling. He put a hand to his waist, clenched his right, protruded his thumb, and pointed it at himself.

“I’m Albano. I was just in the mood to get to know a pretty woman. Well, while I’m at it, I also have something to talk about with your leader.”

When Miranda slackened her arms, and took a stance as if to draw her weapon, her conversation partner frantically persisted it was a joke.

“Don’t get so angry! I really do want to meet your leader! It’s your first Labyrinth mission, right? I don’t want things to get into a mess, so I wanted to take the initiative, and talk things out.”

When she moved her hands away from her weapons, her opponent seemed relieved.

(He looks like he takes things slow, but he sure reacts fast. And he might be quite strong.)

Miranda gave that judgement, and he began to explain the situation.

“Boss Alette is fundamentally here to train up her men. Money-wise, she’ll be fine as long as she doesn’t go into the red. I’ll follow her orders, with her being boss, but any more is uncalled for. To us, she’s a commander to rejoice over.”

After watching the man give his explanation, Miranda spoke.

“And what exactly is It you want from us? If you’re here to cut our profit, I really don’t want to refer you.”

Albano dismissively waved his hand.

“I’m telling you, that’s not it. Boss Alette’s seriously battle-oriented. We’re mobility, or how should I put it, recon-specialized. Well, Well, I’m sure you can tell, you give off the same feeling and all.”

Looking over him, Miranda could tell he was the same sort of unit. Plenty of tools on him, skilled in removing and setting traps. And lightweight garments easy to move around in…

(Come to think of it, all his men were extremely lightly armored. So his entire party is specialized for something like that?)

“So I don’t want you guys to go too far ahead, and stir up trouble. There are some traps and plenty of things I have to leave to you guys, and you don’t want to make an enemy of me or Alette. There’s profit in it for all. You can even confirm it if you want. I’m fine with meeting him when all’s said and done.”

Thinking he was a diligent man unbefitting his appearance, Miranda confirmed something.

“You’ll do that much? If you want us to confirm it, I can send Lyle over to your place.”

Albano made a reluctant expression.

“Now that would be troublesome. They’re not all as mannered as me. Even if they don’t have ill-intent, there are some things that riles them up. Because of that, we’ve gotten into quite a fight with that Creit. And the Boss’ mood’s taken a turn for the worse.”

It seems he did have his reasons when he came over himself.

(Not that I can call you too well-mannered either. But any worse than that really will be a problem. Perhaps he’s decent if he’s at least mindful of that.)

Miranda didn’t feel he had said any lies, but she decided to check anyways.

“I’ll go to Alette-san’s place to confirm it. After that, we’ll meet again. I’m sure I can find you in this base if I look hard enough.”

It wasn’t a large town.

It was merely a small space that held the functionality of one. Not that there were any other villages around to compare it with.

“Fine by me. Then let’s make it tomorrow morning. I’ll be watching the entertainers tomorrow. We’ll have work right after that, and I want to enter the Labyrinth after I’ve explained it out with him. By the way, what was your name?”

Miranda smiled.

“It’s Miranda. Well then, if everything you said was true, then we’ll meet tomorrow. I’ll bring Lyle along.”

After his business was finished, Albano walked off.

While he looked ill-natured, it seemed he at least had enough ability for the guild to recognize him.

(It’ll be different from that Gryphon Subjugation at Centralle. This time, those around us are already used to it, and we’ll be the ones learning a thing or two. Even so…)

Miranda walked towards where Porter was stationed.

The tent prepared there was the place Lyle’s party was to sleep. This time, Porter wouldn’t be able to enter the Labyrinth itself, so it was going to be used as housing.

When she got closer, she found the other members inspecting the supplies received from the guild.

They were food rations, bread, dried meat, and the like.

Monica was seriously thinking over how she was going to cook them.

Lyle was helping Clara check over the Mini-Porter Porter mimic.

May was lying down over Porter’s roof, and letting out a yawn.

Eva displayed interest to the songs drifting through the air, and Novem was cautioning her as she fidgeted restlessly.

Tired from the trip alone, Shannon was limply hanging her legs out of Porter’s loading tray.

Novem was going over their luggage with Eva.

And Miranda looked at Novem’s staff.

(Purchased in Beim, she says? Why was there a need for her to lie about something like that?)

The metallic silver staff boasted quite a simple make. The area to

hold it was carved of black-stained wood.

Silver extended from the wood on both ends, and the upper portion of it also had quite a simple design as far as magicians' staffs go.

She remembered Lyle's reaction shen he first saw it.

『Ah, that one looks like Novem's old staff.』

What part of it? Miranda didn't ask such a question to confirm it, but she knew from the information dealer that she had accepted something staff-like from her family.

(There's a possibility it's something different, but the timing matches up too well.)

Miranda couldn't help but be wary of Novem.

And Novem calmly turned to face her.

It was as if she had noticed her from the start.

(… Someday, I'll peel off that human skin of yours, monster.)

As she returned to her comrades with a smile on her face, Miranda had such a thing on her mind…

5 - Alette Baillet

Invited by Miranda, I went over to the place Alette-san's party's tent was stationed.

I had been confirming Mini-Porter with Clara, but no matter what we did, there were still things we had to look over, so I decided to come here, but…

"As I thought, I'm really not interested."

There, Miranda spoke with a fed-up expression.

"You can't say that after coming all the way here. Notmally, you should have taken care of these matters when you gave the initial greetings."

Miranda's words were correct, and I surely did go and give greetings to Alette-san. But I ended up witnessing something outrageous.

Even I have some mercy in me.

"… I can't harden my heart that much."

"What are you talking about? See, let's just go already!"

Miranda approached the person on lookout, and stated our business. After looking at my face, the guard made a blank expression, then a complicated one before heading into the tent.

Miranda looked at me.

"What did you do?"

"… I haven't done a thing."

That's all I could say. But within the Jewel, the ancestors laughed…

『Yep, it's true; you haven't done a thing. No lies there. But… you're finally coming face to face with Alette-chan! I wonder what's become

of the dreaming maiden!』

『In order to achieve favorable grounds to negotiate on, I am starting to believe the Third's, 'found any takers yet' line might be necessary. Lyle, it's all in the smile, the smile! Make sure you smile to shake up your opponent!』

『Hey, that's only after you determine what sort of person she is. She may have a delinquent side to her. Tease her too much, and she may turn out like a certain someone's wife. That one was scary.』

『… Fifth, could you possibly be talking about me? And wait, I really do think you should follow the Fourth's words, and shake her up to acquire some favorable terms…』

『The Sixth sure did a lot of that in his time, Lyle, make sure you don't learn from his example.』

I let their opinions slide by as per usual, as I watched the guard from before come out with a dubous expression, and grant us entry.

"… It seems she is willing to meet you."

Sensing the surrounding atmosphere, Miranda to me.

"Hey, why is the air so tense? You really didn't do anything, right? Or could it be you were the one getting things done to?"

To her worry, I spoke.

"You'll understand when you meet her."

And saying that, we set foot into the tent's interior.

Within it, were Alette-san, and the tall knight who'd dealt with me the first time.

"U-um… it's been a while."

When I said that, the knight cut off the conversation with, 'it sure has.' Miranda also gave a, 'pleasure to meet you~' as a greeting, but…

Alette-san was sitting in front of a desk with her eyes cast down.

And…

“K-kill me!”

“… Eh?”

The air surrounding the stage turned strange. She suddenly requested someone to kill her.

Not only that, she began holding her head in both hands, and banging her forehead against the desk.

“Just kill me already! What fun do you find in torturing me so!? That’s right, I’m just a woman who let her marrying years slip by! I mean, there was no helping it! I never thought I’d be promoted there! I never thought work would take up what semblance of free time I had left! There was no helping it… it’s all work’s fault…”

Miranda was smiling, but her expression was cramping up.

The male knight who looked to be her adjutant silently held a hand to his face.

“No, I’m here for a separate matter today–”

“—A separate matter? What? So you’re saying that I’m not even worth it to tease!? If you haven’t come to laugh… then just what purpose could you have come here, dammit!”

The knight couldn’t remain silent any longer, lowering a chop over Alette-san’s head.

“Captain, just get over it already. If you’re like that during the subjugation, then it wouldn’t be strange if some lives were thrown down.”

Alette-san corrected her breathing that had gone into a mess, and cleared her throat.

“S-sorry. It was just too embarrassing for me… now then, what business do you have, Lyle-kun?”

Having calmed down with some deep breathes, she looked like a totally different person that before.

With a swiftly-formed business-like expression, she motioned for us to sit. If that was how she treated me when we first met, I would have unquestioningly held a favorable impression of her.

But the sentiment the current me has towards this woman…

(Just what could it be, these restless feelings.)

… I'm sure it was sympathy.

She was my compatriot who had gone through the same drastic after-Growth symptoms. I decided not to tease her over it.

I sat across the table from her, and as she's calm down, I got the leisure to take in some of my surroundings.

The Third.

『Huh! You're not going to say anything about it? Even when it's sure to be interesting?』

He put out a disappointed voice, but I ignored it.

The inside of the tent had what seemed to be Alette-san's belongings, her bed, her armor, and other things of the like. The desk in the very center was large, and it had various writing tools scattered around.

A form of Magic Tool, a lantern gave a steady stream of light to the dark interior.

And equipment-wise, she had assembled some reliable ones.

The one to stand out most among them was probably her large two-handed sword. There's almost no doubt it's a an master artisan's work.

The Fifth.

『Rather than an adventurer, it seems she's a bonifide knight. Just what are these guys? For what sake are they out adventuring?』

All I knew was that they were a knight brigade from somewhere or another. That they were carrying out adventurer work to train up the

next generation, and that as long as they were making some sort of profit, they didn't really care about the rewards.

Miranda explained the situation to her.

"An adventurer named Albano said I'd understand some things if I came to you. Something about not getting in the way of other peoples' work."

Alette-san listened and nodded.

"I thought I'd say it tomorrow, but I see. Albano… He must have learned a lesson from that fight with Creit. It's a good medicine now and again."

Her tone was a little rough, but she gave off a kind impression.

And she began explaining the situation to us.

"We are adventurers, but one we return home, we'll be knights. It may be strange to call it a knight's errantry, but we've merely come to Beim to build up experience. Well, it's something of a tradition. Train your ability in real combat, and go get your own meal ticket."

She said that in a joking manner, but the Fourth in the Jewel reacted.

『How nice~ That's a nice one~.』

After explaining her own situation, she began going into Albano-san's situation.

"There are various reasons, but I think we have a favorable relationship with Albano's party. In truth, they're quite reliable in reconnaissance, enemy detection, trap removal and trap placement. It's not something we wouldn't be able to take up on our own, but we've gotten to leave it to them."

It seems Albano-san was telling the truth when he said he had permission.

Miranda was a little dissatisfied.

"Meaning you give the front line to them, and leave them alone? You simply let them take all the good parts?"

Alette-san gave a bitter smile.

“Please don’t say it. And I want to quickly clear up the first five floors to let the temporary parties in. After that, you can take responsibility of yourselves, and do whatever you want.”

Hearing that, Miranda narrowed her eyes.

“… The unpermitted parties into the Labyrinth?”

Alette-san smiled at her glare. If I didn’t have that unfortunate image of her in my mind, I’m sure I would be genuinely astounded by how reliable she looked.

And that’s how I wished I was thinking.

“Up to the fifth floor, that is. They went as far as to guard us, so they’d be unsatisfied returning without any profit. Also, the fact that they’re here means that they’re indirectly adventurers we’ve recognized. There will be little chance of them failing miserably and pulling us down.”

But she won’t say there’s no chance at all.

“So should we generally be following behind Albano-san’s party?”

Alette-san shook her head.

“The first three floor have been cleared already, apparently. The apparently is because it’s yet to be determined whether this is one where the bosses revive, or where they won’t appear again. We’ll be having Albano’s group investigate that. And it’s quite a dangerous job. Even if they have the juicy parts, I don’t think it unfair.”

They were proceeding far ahead, and informing the rest of the danger. Their aptitude to dive into such a dangerous place was something Alette-san must recognize.

With this being my first Labyrinth mission, where I’m more just learning the way things go in Beim, there would be no point in me refuting anything here.

I smiled.

“Understood. We’ll try our best to avoid any actions that may hinder or cause trouble to your parties. Well, we’re the newcomers, so there are quite a few things I’d hope you’d teach us, so we’ll follow your words.”

Alette-san smiled as well, and praised me.

“Make sure you treasure those feelings. Being too earnest is a problem in itself. Well, if you’re looking for peculiar ones, among us, it would have to be Albano, Creit, and Marina, perhaps?”

She threw out three names.

(I’ve heard all of them before. And wait, peculiar? More so than Alette-san?)

Miranda pressed further for information on the three.

“So are those three a danger? If they’re to be enemies, I’d appreciate some information on them.”

Alette-san with a smile.

“Unfortunately, adventurers, what’s more acquaintances aren’t on my list of people to sell out. Let’s just leave it at peculiar; there’s not much danger to be found. It’s something to confirm with your own eyes.”

(… If she’s usually this level-headed, it only makes the pitifulness of her post-Growths more prominent. If only I hadn’t seen it, she would’ve look so much cooler…)

I thought it a little unfortunate as I ended the conversation.

❼

The next day, I had brought me feet early in the morning to where a troupe of performers were unveiling their act.

I had come alongside Miranda, but…

“Don’t be fooled, Lyle-kun! That guy’s an outrageous man!”

Black hair tightly swept to the back, with a well-kept appearance, 【Creit Benini】 stuck his finger out at the man I was meeting: Albano.

But I was only really here to discuss not getting in the way of others' work.

Albano-san had an unpleased expression on his face as well.

The party led by the overly serious Creit-san was the polar opposite of Albano-san's.

Their equipment consisted of full metal breastplate, gauntlet and sabaton. The weapons they carried included not only spears and swords, but axes and maces as well.

Albano-san was wearing a robe, and the protectors he had attached were all only leather at best. Rather than armor, perhaps he possessed more tools of the trade? That was the sort of impression his attire gave off.

"Creit, won't you put an end to it already? I'm here talking about business. The boss even told us to clear up to the fifth floor fast as we can!"

To Albano-san's irritated face, Creit-san directed some vexation.

"Did that person really… a splendid knight as she is, for her not to protect the Guild's basic rules…"

Miranda spoke to me in a quiet voice.

"Hey, it seems that man looks up to knights."

The Sixth was a little fed-up.

『Ah, yeah, you find these sorts here and there. At times, it's ridiculously enervating dealing with one too serious. It's not a bad mindset, but that's not what it takes for the world to turn.』

As I thought, he was a troublesome individual.

I.

"… No, what do you expect me to do about it?"

Today was the day we would genuinely begin the conquest of the Labyrinth, and around the town were adventurers walking around with all their equipment equipped.

The performers were looking over us thrilled expressions.

(These ones are the same as Eva. So it's not like she was an abnormality.)

When I held such an impression, Creit-san cautioned here.

"Get this, Lyle-kun! Those guys are former bandits! What's more, they're the sort where breaking the rules is only natural. You must watch your back in the Labyrinth."

Saying that, Creit-san walked off taking his party along.

Albano-san on the other hand.

"Tsk, I had to meet that man on such a sweltering morning. Even when my tensions were up from having a beauty to talk to talk to… We're leaving, men."

"Got it."
"But that damn Creit, he's still holdin' a grudge over it."
"Hahaha, next time, let's sick a monster on 'im from behind."

Unlike Albano-san, his comrades had clearer ill-intent.

Lowering his voice a little, Albano-san.

"… Yeah, yeh, just get a move on. If you're looking for money to play around, then it all depends on how fast you lot can finish this bloody job."

While he seemed detached, he had an air threatening enough to lead such a strong-willed group around.

(I'm a little jealous.)

So I decided to return to Porter's station with Miranda.

"We should get going soon. Though today, we'll only be getting a feel of what sort of Labyrinth it is."

Walking beside me, Aria was…

“With that, all that’s left is the solo Marina-san. What sort of person do you think she is?”

That being said, I shook my head.

“Who knows?”

I could only pray she wasn’t any more peculiar than the other two.

❼

After we returned to Porter, Eva immediately turned sour when she learned there was a ruckus.

“Why!? Why didn’t you take me along!? How mortifying… it must have been quite an interesting show!”

She was to keep house today, and by the dishevelment of her hair, it appears she truly was mortified.

“No, there wasn’t any fighting or anything.”

When I gave an excuse, she glared at me.

“There’s a trigger in everything! It’s the buildup of these small events that will give birth to meaning somewhere down the road! Ah~ how could this be. Perhaps I should let off a song to relieve stress~.”

The fleeting glances she sent at me looked to be pleading for me to negotiate to let her have the stage.

While I was talking with Eva, Novem cleared her throat.

“Eva-san?”

A warm smile directed at her, Eva reluctantly began to back down.

“Uuuh, understood.”

On the first day, I, Clara, Aria and Miranda would be going in to test the waters.

Novem, Eva, May, Shannon, and Monica would stay here.

Novem directed a smile at me.

“Well then, Lyle-sama… please take care.”

“I’ll do my best not to get injured. Novem, I leave the others to you.”

Saying that, I took Aria and co. to the entrance of the Labyrinth.

6 - Precious Stone

A dark Labyrinth corridor.

From that space that resembled the inside of a cave, I could hear the sound of running water somewhere.

When Clara turned on the light from her staff to illuminate the area, I could see stalactites on the ceiling.

The ground was highly uneven, and the width of the passages couldn't be more than five meters.

Because of those stalactites on the ceiling, it felt lower than it was.

Having entered the Labyrinth alongside us, Aria let out a whitened breath.

"It's really cold in here."

She wasn't lightly dressed, but even so, she had chosen garments easier to move around with, and had neglected her protection against the cold.

I was also feeling it, and it was harsher than I had anticipated.

Clara.

"There is water dripping down the stalactites. Based on the location, puddles form on the floor. The passage has curved a few times, but… Porter truly won't fit throuth."

At present, after being dispatched by the Guild, we were wandering around the first floor of the Labyrinth they had discovered.

Its cave-like entrance suddenly began with a stairway.

I, Aria, Miranda, and Clara had entered just to examine the place.

Miranda.

"All that comes out are creepy bat-like monsters, and the occasional

frog? Please give me a break.”

I’m not sure who that was directed at.

But both Aria and Miranda didn’t raise a cry in battle, as they disinterestedly fought off the monsters. No, perhaps it’s best to say triumphed over.

I myself was using the Skills【Map】and【Search】to look over the map of the first floor as I observed the movements of the other adventurers.

“… Next take the right.”

We avoided the passage that would turn into a dead end a long ways down, and turned right.

Straight ahead was a party beside ours that had already gone and turned around.

It was just the first day.

Albano-san’s party was at the very front, and following them, all the other parties poured into the Labyrinth.

When I strained my ears, I could hear the sounds of battle around.

(It’s a narrow maze. That’s all good and well, but will the bosses revive?)

When we entered the Labyrinth, there was no reaction from the floors boss.

The space leading down to the second lower level was a wide room, but there wasn’t any reading coming from within it.

It seems Albano-san’s group had already descended down, and we were just walking around to find all we could about the first floor.

(While it’s true the lead gets to hog all the treasure chests… there are plenty they’ve missed.)

They prioritized moving on, and disarming the traps along the way. If that wasn’t possible, they put clear markers to indicate the danger.

Walking ahead, Aria stopped, and pulled a dagger she kept at her hip.

She determined the enemy coming wouldn't even require her short spear, and she took a stance with her shielded left arm up front.

I also pulled a sabre. I could hear the beating of wings.

Miranda stuck her hand in her robe, and pulled it out with long needles held in the gaps between her fingers, she aimed at the ceiling, and threw them.

In a dim area ahead, I could hear the sound of several things dropping…

"Tsk, two of them got away. Lyle, Aria, they're all yours."

While she sounded annoyed, she had managed to take out three of them.

Aria took a large swing of her dagger, cutting down one of the giant Bat that came at us.

I used my sabre to impale the other one.

I pierced its torso, and the bat let off a high pitch cry before it ceased to draw breath.

Looking warily around the surroundings, Clara- who was leading Mini-Porter along- put down her staff, and began extracting materials and magic stones from the Bats.

Since she had taken her hand off her staff, the light went out.

I pointed my right palm at the ceiling, and prepared a light of my own. Clara…

"Thank you."

Said that as she got to work.

Aria kept watch of the front, and Miranda of the rear.

I looked over the monsters.

“Those wings are over a meter each when spread out. There’re some differences among individuals, but… these guys have quite eerie faces, do they not?”

I wasn’t searching for cuteness in a monster, but the Jewel at my neck was different.

Once more, the Fifth…

『It’s just a monster… it’s just a monster… but if you look closely, I get the feeling it would make quite a cute…』

In regards to him, the Fourth.

『Just what part are you looking at?』

Let out an irritable voice.

And while I was lost in thought, Clara called over to me.

“Lyle-san.”

“Yes?”

I turned to her, and she lifted up the monster to show its full size. When she spread out the wings, they were enough to hide her small build.

“This is the biggest one today.”

Hearing that, I examined it.

“It’s one Miranda took out? Let’s reclaim the needle… still, there’s quite a range here.”

Clara proceeded to dismantle the creature as she voiced her agreement.

“Yes. The small ones are reasonable sized. The size of their Magic Stones remains relatively constant, and the price of materials by size isn’t all that…”

It would be troublesome to have a price named on each and every one of them, but we should be able to place some expectations on

the final profit.

I looked at the Mini-Porter Clara had inserted her staff into.

Its bottom was a deep box, and the only attachments it had were wheels and legs to descend stairs, but its head was the same sort of cylindrical column with two small glass balls embedded for eyes.

Monica persisted that such an attachment was necessary if we ever wanted to name it as a Porter.

And I agreed wholeheartedly.

“Come to think of it, Porter was also quite simple to begin with. He’s grown quite splendidly.”

Clara looked a little reluctant.

“Any more splendor and I will be troubled. It’s reaching the limit to what I can operate.”

And saying that, she tucked away the collected materials and stones into Mini-Porter.

She stowed them away organized by type, and once that was done, she picked up her staff to move again.

I extinguished my light, and confirmed the next place we would be headed on the Map.

A majority of the monsters had already been hunted out by other adventurers, so there really was no place for us but to proceed onwards.

(Should we go off and claim the treasures Albano-san’s group let slide?)

Even if you called them treasure chests, they didn’t take on the shape of wooden boxes.

They were containers embedded into the walls, and were quite often in places quite difficult to find.

However, with the Skills【Map】and【Search】, I could easily

determine the location of those hidden items.

As I started walking, I addressed everyone.

“We’ll be taking a break in the next large room we find.”

Aria was delighted.

“That’s a life saver. And wait, its much colder than I thought. We brought firewood anyways, so we’ll be lighting one up, right?”

We had a tin of moderate size with us, filled with wood we could light.

There were other tools we could use, but I also wanted to test how these would work out.

Of all else, while you could instantly achieve warmth if you used a magic tool, this method was much more cost-efficient.

We could collect fallen boughs along the way to restock, and you wouldn’t need to supply Magic Stones as you would for a Magic Tool.

“We’ll also have a meal. Though after we find the entrance to the second floor, we’ll be returning for the day.”

Miranda spoke.

“Wouldn’t it be best we checked the state of the second level?”

I shook my head.

“We would probably fare fine, but I don’t want to push it. And I get the feeling all the parties today came just for a preliminary surveying.”

By the map in my head, a majority of the other parties didn’t try to push themselves, and turned back as soon as they found the stairs down.

A lot of them went into searching for treasure as we were momentarily.

And as planned, we entered the large room the treasure chest was supposed to be in.

❼

When we returned from the Labyrinth, the sky was still blue.

I stretched as I walked out, and my skin informed me that the inside of it had been much colder than the outside air.

“Now then, about how much are our earnings for the day?”

When I looked into Mini-Porter, I found it stuffed quite full.

It was definitely more than what someone could be tasked with carrying.

But…

“We defeated quite a number, but at this rate, our luggage will be full by the time we reach the second floor. Even if we avoid battle as much as possible, by the fourth or fifth… it’s at the point I’d like another Porter unit or two.”

As Clara expressed that opinion, Aria agreed.

“You’re quite right. I’d like to reduce the load on hand, but if it’s going to be that loaded, we won’t be able to put any spare equipment on it.”

Miranda.

“Can’t we just hang things on the side? It’s not like it’s got a usable shield there like Porter does or anything.”

I.

“So there are still spots for improvement. I’ll discuss it with Monica, so let’s just bring everything back to the tent… huh?”

Near the Labyrinth’s entrance, a guild employee was helping out in raising a tent.

But for some reason, beyond that were a line of complete buildings.

Thinking I may be tired, I rubbed my eyes a few times, but that did not seem to help.

Looking around, the place was much more developed than it had been yesterday.

“What’s this…”

Aria was just as surprised as me.

Clara.

“As expected of the Adventurers of Beim. They’re quite skillful at matters like these. I’m finally seeing what they meant when they said a town would be formed.”

Miranda alone sounded like she was having fun.

“Hmm, it sure has grown big. And wait, I never thought it would come this far. And is it just me, or has the population multiplied?”

In the Jewel, the Third spoke quietly.

『It’s just like the Magician’s Village… wait, huh? Wasn’t that a cautionary tale of what not to do?』

It’s nice and all to be lively, but I tilted my head at whether there was any meaning to all this.

We headed to the building managed by the guild, and went into selling our loot to the assembled merchants and personnel.

They didn’t mind if we sold the items besides Magic Stones to other merchants, so I started off by selling off our Magic Stones to the guild.

Not many adventurers had returned yet, so I was able to sell them immediately.

“Good work. Well them, I will proceed to confirm the Stones.”

Saying that, the receptionist looked over the Magic Stones, and

began to measure their weight. I asked.

“This is quite- how should I put this… do they really plan to start up a new town here?”

She looked at my face.

“Oh, is this your first participation? And wait, rather than plan, they’re already in the process is more accurate. We’re not actually planning to use it as a town, but we’re thinking it will be fine as long as it can be usable in a foreseeable future.”

As I pondered over the matter, she displayed the sum for the Stones.

I nodded, accepted the money, and met up with the rest of my party, who’d gone to sell the materials.

Around the area, a number of different merchants were on standby to purchase them.

If I had to say, they were all young.

I to Aria.

“How did it go?”

There.

“They’re buying things for less than in Beim. Since they helped in transporting adventurer supplies and guarding and other things that cost money for free, they said from the start they’d pay less, after all.”

But as we were near a Labyrinth of monsters, we’d still likely get earn much more than usual.

It was an exclusive space with almost nothing but monsters, and their encounter rate was sky high.

If you look at the sum as the earnings of four people over the course of one day, it was plenty.

“… Well, if we proceed at this rate, we won’t go into the red, at the

very least.”

Looking at the day’s profits, I confirmed that, and nodded.

There, Clara.

“Lyle, what shall we do about that?”

I started walking with everyone towards the place Porter was parked.

“Let’s put it on hold. There’s sure to be a way to use it, and there’s more than enough time to hear everyone’s opinion on the matter first.”

The ‘that’ Clara spoke of was the treasure.

Meaning the item we retrieved from the treasure chest.

It was a form a sort of precious stone, but not like an ore. It was a stone that looked like it had been in its refined state from the start.

If we sold it, would probably fetch several tens of gold.

That all depends on the quality of the stone, but a majority of items found in Labyrinths were imbued with Mana. That put them a few levels above your normal gemstone.

And usability-wise, it was often the case they were used as ingredients in Magic Tools in a similar way to Rare Metal.

Clara adjusted the positioning of her glasses.

“Even so, it’s only just been discovered, yet this Labyrinth must have been in service for a number of years. For such a precious treasure to be obtainable on only the first floor.”

Even if the place was only just discovered, I won’t say it’s a rare tale for it to have existed from times long passed.

It could even be the case that it was just on the verge of bursting and spitting up its contents when it was found by the guild.

“Those stalactites right? Aren’t those things that take several

decades or centuries to form? Labyrinths sure do have their share of mysteries.”

My opinion, having entered it, was that it was quite cold, and you would often get wet, so it would be quite difficult to maintain your physical state in there.

Also, its passages were narrow, so even if you brought along a large number, there was a possibility most wouldn’t even be able to participate in battle.

On pot of that, we’d have to confirm there were no other parties around the corner if we wanted to use magic.

“Tomorrow, I’ll put Aria and Miranda on rest, and bring along the remaining members. Novem, Eva and May… what should we do about Monica?”

Miranda gave a bitter smile.

“I see Shannon’s not even being counted from the get go. As her sister, I’d like her to get a grasp on her situation already, so I recommend she be sent into the Labyrinth.”

Hearing that, I.

“Then perhaps the day after tomorrow? Ah, it’ll work out if I include Miranda there.”

We challenged it with a small number this time to see how it would be.

But from tomorrow onwards, there shouldn’t be a problem if we go with five or six.

And while we were having such a conversation, we walked through the lively town streets, and arrived at Porter’s station.

In a large pot… cauldron, Monica was making something.

Aria noticed it.

“Ah, just looking at it warms me up. I want to eat soon.”

She was making quite a peaceful expression, and it did smell delicious.

(Preparing these things after returning is a pain, so having comrates stay behind is something to be thankful for. I should probably plan this with those that can do housework in mind… this might get a little complicated.)

Being few in numbers came with its own share of troubles.

But if we increased them, I was beginning to realize those troubles would only begin to multiply.

7 - Peridot

Night.

I held the pea-green gemstone between my fingers, and looked at it through the light of the lantern.

“It’s quite big. What’s more, it’s been cut quite cleanly.”

The precious stone of about ten centimeters across was considerably beautiful.

At times, the treasures found in a Labyrinth could fetch a hefty sum even if they weren’t too deep inside.

But that was an extremely rare case.

The reason I hadn’t sold it yet was because the value of a gemstone imbued with magic wasn’t anything fixed. There’s no doubt it was something valuable, but even I couldn’t determine what a fair price for it would be.

I wasn’t the only one looking at it through the light.

Through the light of the lantern hung at the front portion of porter, Shannon watched it as well. She sat next to me, and examined the stone in my hands.

“That’s somehow really pretty. It’s collected a ton of magic; never seen something like that before. Hey, won’t you give it to me?”

“Ha ha ha, fat chance.”

I tucked it away into my breast pocket, and held back Shannon’s head as she flailed her arms at me.

There, Novem called over.

“… It’s Peridot, I believe.”

I turned around, and tilted my head as I wondered how long she’d

been there.

Surprised at Novem's presence nearby, Shannon quickly fled.

(Ah, so she was slacking off from work again.)

Sighing at Shannon's usual disposition, I took the precious stone out once more.

"Want to see it?"

I handed it over to Novem.

She accepted it, and looked it over…

"… For the first floor, it's quite a precious gemstone. I had heard it wasn't that old a Labyrinth, though."

The dormant treasure would constantly be soaked in the Labyrinth's magic, increasing their value.

And since Shannon, who could see magic with her eyes, said it was something she'd never seen before, it must hold a considerable value.

(Shannon may have that career path available. As an appraiser, or such.)

Novem handed the stone back to me.

"What do you plan to do with it?"

Well I hadn't really decided on that yet.

"I'm considering the options right now. As long as we have it, I get the feeling we'll make a profit even if we don't do a thing for the rest of the expedition. It may be useful for something, but it would stand out too much if we investigated that while we're here."

Novem spoke to me.

"… How about leaving it with someone?"

I shook my head.

“No, it’s worth a lot, so I’ll keep hold of it. It’d be on my mind if I left it behind, and it isn’t much a burden at all.”

Novem looked like she wanted to say something, but she immediately smile, and agreed with my opinion.

❼

The second day of Labyrinth clearing.

This time I took along Novem, Clara, Eva and May.

Clara was doing consecutive runs, but as she was support, she wouldn’t be participating in battle.

I do think it rough, but she wasn’t one to complain over something of this level, so I ended up putting her on the job.

While we were heading to the Labyrinth, I called over to her.

“Sorry for having you on two days in a row.”

And she…

“No problem at all. One day rotations just means we’d be returning by the end of the day… in the first place, we’re at least going up to the fifth floor eventually, tight? In that case, you should really choose the members you bring along with care.”

Inside the cave.

After descending to the second lower level, I got a general grasp of the Labyrinth’s structures.

We’d still be fighting in narrow passages.

Still a cold cave with dripping water.

It was a Labyrinth that’s width didn’t increase the further you went down.

The fact there was a boss a floor was troublesome, but other than that, it was of low difficulty, and comparatively an easy one to

conquer.

On just the first day, the recons had already gone through the third floor. That was the present state of affairs.

The bosses had yet to respawn, and it may not be long before the main members of the gathered parties begin going off to try clearing it for real.

“It really depends on Alette-san. But there are some Labyrinths that undergo drastic changes at certain points, apparently, so we’ll have to proceed with care.”

There’s a lot of unknowns about Labyrinths.

Wearing a coat over her usual drafty-looking clothing, May walked leisurely with her hands behind her head.

“… Given a day, I’d be able to take this one out in no time.”

To a powerful lifeform such as a Quilin, it does appear a Labyrinth of this time is no problem at all.

But that would be bothersome, so I told her to endure the urge this time.

“Bear with it. It’ll be noisy if the Labyrinth is cleared all of a sudden. After floor five, it seems the forces here plan on proceeding leisurely, so we’ll do the same.”

Rather than not wanting to stand out, I wanted to use this job to see how the adventurers of Beim went about their work.

Eva had a short bow in a cylinder strapped to the back of her hip, and a dagger in her hands as she walked ahead.

Unlike her arrogance in the forest, she was constantly complaining.

“It’s dark, and hard to walk and cold and… I hate it here.”

(The forest was dark and hard to walk too, you know…)

Even so, she carried out her job as the advance guard.

With the Skills【Map】and【Search】, I confirmed the surrounding situation as we proceeded, but a number of adventurer parties had descended further down.

But as expected, it doesn't seem they were prepared to spend nights over in its depths yet.

Novem spoke.

"When the third day comes around, they'll probably defeat the first remaining boss. With that momentum, the area up to the fifth floor'll probably be cleared."

Once floor five was cleared, Alette-san would allow the adventurers who tagged along to enter the Labyrinth.

If they had luck on their side, they may be able to obtain some treasure emitted by the walls.

Of course, from my point of view as I walked down the second floor, all the treasure had already been nabbed up

(So my luck from the first day won't go on.)

I felt the monsters had gone down in numbers as well.

The adventurers must have gone around slaying them for money to play around.

"We'll go down to the third floor today, and confirm the situation. When tomorrow comes, Alette-san and co will probably challenge the boss, so I want to do a preliminary examination."

Alette-san herself had little interest in treasure, but there were some things she was fixated on.

One of them was fighting the bosses.

The other battles in the Labyrinth were the same, but it seems she wasn't compromising when it came to battle.

If someone was going to be fighting a boss, it would be her own forces, ot so she asserted.

In exchange for that, all other fields were given a degree of freedom.

And as long as she wasn't at a deficit, Alette-san didn't feel there was a problem.

She wasn't even originally an adventurer. That fact she was one for a limited time only was a large contributing factor.

Since I was walking with my mind on the Map, we were soon able to find the staircase leading down.

And so the five of us descended them…

"… Well this is…"

Apart from Albano-san's party, there were some flashily running rampant in battle.

They were fighting monsters, of course.

If I strained my ears, I could hear the sounds of battle nearby.

Eva made a reluctant expression.

"… Hey, it's dangerous if you use magic in such a confined place, right?"

She seemed worried as to whether we'd be dragged into the mess.

May didn't mind it.

"Then just block it, why don't you? More importantly, Won't it all end if we just breezed through and took care of it? Today's supper is meat, so I want to return quickly."

Novem cautioned the two of them.

"They should pay a level of mind to us. And let's not try to approach another party either. Also, even if you return, that doesn't expedite the rate you'll be getting dinner, May-san."

Unable to go against her, they gave short answers, and continued down the passage.

Seeing that, Clara.

“Novem-san is quite loved by demi-human races.”

Those words caused me to recall.

(Come to think of it, during the Gryphon subjugation, I get the feeling the Dwarves and Gnomes were especially fond of her… no, is it just my imagination?)

While the automaton Monica directed open hostility towards her, demi-humans took a liking to her quite easily.

(Well, she’s a nice person… isn’t that all it is?)

❼

We returned safely the second day, liquidized our assets, and were on the way to reunite with the rest of our comrades.

Watching the town grow day by day, I really wondered what they planned on doing with it.

The tents decreased, and the buildings increased.

More food stalls, rising vigor.

Having walked outside, I looked upon the scenery and muttered.

“This is the Magician’s Village itself, isn’t it.”

Clara nodded at my words.

“That it is.”

There, Eva.

“Ah, I’ve heard of that one.”

Novem nodded along, but one person alone… May looked at me with wonder.

“What’s that Magician’s Village thing supposed to be?”

And from the Jewel, the Fifth let his voice.

『Lyle, how about you tell May? Kindly teach her.』

The Sixth spoke gaudily.

『You really are kind on animals.』

I was about to explain, but Novem and Eva had already moved in.

Novem gave a simple explanation.

“It’s a story of where a magician once made a town so hopeless it fell to ruin long ago.”

A little enthusiastic, Eva.

“Solving everything with magic, his good will went and destroyed the town.”

Hearing that, May seemed to get a general idea of it.

“Ah, so that’s how it is. People who can use magic, and those that can’t… that’s how humans are divided, right. From my point of view, you’re all using magic anyways.”

We continued walking down the lively townscape, as Clara went further into the details.

“It starts with a single magician stopping by a poor village. He used his magic to get the monsters to retreat, and received the thanks of the villagers. And so the magician settled down there to use his magic for the village’s sake.”

It was a cautionary tale.

“At first, the villagers rejoiced. The magician did all he could with his magic to help their land. But when he began producing farming tools for their sake, the craftsmen all left.”

The reason being that from production to repair, the magician could handle it all alone.

And so the craftsmen could no longer put food on the table.

“Next, he used his magic to make the village plentiful. An abundant

harvest every year, and with his spells, he made iron and silver, and even money itself. The villagers lost the need to work."

No matter how much effort they put in, or how dirty they got their hands, it was the same plentiful harvest every year. Their desire to exert themselves died down. And so the village was so prosperous it didn't even need a tax.

"Eventually, the villagers multiplied, and the village grew. And so that became the start of a town. The larger it became, the more apparent it was, that the magician alone was not enough to manage it all anymore."

It had grown beyond a manageable level, but having learned a life of luxury, the villagers could do nothing but continue to rely on that lone magician.

And the magician began to think it natural he took care of everything himself.

"So the magician ran himself ragged for the village every day, and the villagers would complain whenever they were needing. The magician collapsed under it all, and crossed to the other side. And everything after was problem after problem. The villagers who'd relied on the magician had become affluent and arrogant."

May spoke amazed.

"They should've just returned to their original lifestyles."

If that was possible, there wouldn't be an issue.

Having a drop in the quality of life is quite a hard thing to face.

And wait, I went and troubled Novem quite a bit with that one.

Clara recited the end of the tale.

"No craftsmen. A massive drop in harvests, and barely a man left to put in any earnest work. Without a tax to pay, the village soon returned to the needy state it was in before. And…"

May looked to have gotten the grasp of it.

“… Within their despair, the villagers perished alongside their village. Without being razed by monster or thief, without crying out for help. All they did was accompany their village to the grave.”

If you think about it, there’s no way those around would lend aid to the village that’d gotten haughty off its abundance.

There’re various reasons, but anyways, the moral of the story is…

“To summarize, they couldn’t keep up with the rapid development, is how it is. The magic made them plentiful, and when that magic faded, they fell to ruin. It’s not like good intentions will always bring about something good, and you should put the proper thought into it when you plan on using magic.”

Though it’s not like you’ll find a magician willing to be so goody-goody all the time.

Eva had given those closing lines, and Clara looked a little unsatisfied.

(… Eva… she took off with the good parts.)

As if she herself was unaware of it, she was happily conversing with May.

From the Jewel, I heard the Fourth’s voice.

『Lyle, as a man, silently follow through.』

I called over to Clara.

“Hey Clara, what do you think the Magician’s Village was trying to say? From my point of view, it was about the important points of governing people.”

At this point, I’m not inheriting a territory, but I can’t help but think of it that way.

Clara listened quietly to my words.

“I think there’s something in that as well. If you want to look from the villagers’ perspective, then don’t rely too much on a convenient thing, or don’t forget to be thankful, or something along those lines. But…”

“But?”

“… Personally, there are times when I think, perhaps in the end, magic is naught but a fleeting illusion.”

There are plenty of books out there where the impression received changes from reader to reader.

And of that, Clara felt that magic could all just be an illusion.

Walking beside us, Novem spoke.

“They’re the grace of the heavens. Magic and Skills were the last gift of the goddess. Though originally, I doubt such a thing would have been necessary.”

When I turned to her, Novem was smiling.

But she looked a little sad to my eyes.

❼

… The fourth floor of the Labyrinth.

The ones who’d stepped into those lands were Albano’s party.

It was the Third day since the kickoff of Labyrinth clearing.

Having defeated the fourth floor’s boss, Alette appeared to meet up with Albano, who’d gone to scout ahead.

It was just after battle, and seeing the knights barely showing any fatigue, Albano let out a whistle.

“Wearing such heavy armor to take down a boss, you sure are a curious bunch.”

To his light tone of speech, Alette removed her helmet, and sent a jest back without changing her expression.

“To a knight, this armor is no different than standing naked. Find it arousing, Albano?”

Hearing that, Albano broke into a smile.

“Hey don’t go grouping me together with Creit, boss! Now then, need a guide to the Boss of the next floor?”

Alette looked around at the surrounding members.

“… Right. Go search out a room we can rest. If you’re to find the boss, inform us. If you’ve trouble dealing with monsters, use my men to deal with them if you will.”

While she ordered Albano’s party to find them a room, they were still smiling.

Because to both sides, it was more convenient that way.

If Alette’s party went along, then the monsters they defeated, and the treasures they found would go off fifty-fifty.

And where was the fun in that?

“Very well. As I thought, it seems we’ll get along just fine. It’s alright if the treasure go to finders keepers, right?”

Alette sounded a little fed-up.

“Leave some to the rest, won’t you? If you take them all, then you’re the ones who’ll be getting the complaints. Well, our goal isn’t treasures, but battle. Find something, and you can do with it what you will. But don’t go nabbing the treasure in the deepest chamber.”

Alette’s party planned to defeat the Boss of the innermost chamber themselves, and they did have the ability to do so.

Albano’s party had acted alongside Alette’s, so they weren’t particularly tired. He walked off, and waved his hand.

“Yeah, it ain’t possible for us, and we’re going to be raking it in by fishing out treasure chests. In that case, do you want us to lay traps outside the innermost chamber? So no hindrances get in?”

Alette smiled at his jest.

“No need. If there’s a party capable of stealing a march on us, then

so be it. More so, I'd welcome it if they can beat the boss before us. Well then, I'll leave it to you."

"Yep, all me!"

Albano's party ran off, and it wasn't long before they could no longer be seen.

A single knight confirmed it with Alette.

"Was that alright, captain? There're even rumors those guys are former bandits."

Alette smiled, and looked at her subordinate.

"And what of it? They're necessary for our goal of clearing this Labyrinth. Therefore, we shall use them. And isn't it fine to leave it at that? Beim isn't our homeland. We have no authority to crack down on criminals here."

The knight looked unsatisfied. He surely disliked working alongside former thieves.

So to her subordinate, Alette…

"That purity is a good thing to have. But be a bit more flexible."

The knight confirmed it with her.

"Captain Alette, do you plan on recruiting Albano?"

The knights' goal.

It was also to recruit new personnel. Not for the knight brigade, but to take proficient people back with them to their fatherland.

But…

"I only want to get along with him in Beim. In Beim, that is. Creit is too hard-headed to use. Marina is a lone wolf. It's a pity we've yet to find anyone that fits the bill just yet, but Albano's party is out of the question."

They were surely proficient, but you'd have to stay mindful to make

sure they didn’t raise a ruckus. And they were too greedy, prone to raising problems with their surroundings.

To train the brigade that would become the next main power of the country, they had come to Beim.

It was also a tradition of the fatherland.

They were surrounded by powerful enemies, and in a situation they could never drop their guard.

Their desire for power brought about a conclusion to train up their knights by giving them experience as adventurers. That was the verdict the country had reached.

Training up her noble subordinates and making them elites was Alette’s job.

(Now then, will any interesting people come out this time?)

As Alette raised her expectations, a single person did come to mind.

8 - Message

Five days after the Labyrinth crawling commenced, the fifth floor had been safely cleared.

The parties that wouldn't originally have been permitted to enter were now scrambling about to take out the monsters wandering about.

With the boss having been slain, Alette-san put some of her party members on the fifth floor as lookouts.

They stood on standby around the center, and made sure no irrelevant adventurers were to descend down any further.

All the members of our party had experienced the Labyrinth at least once.

That considered, we decided to take an all-inclusive day off.

If it was up to the fifth floor, we'd be able to go and return in a day. Because with the bosses gone, and the monster numbers lessened, we'd rarely end up in battle.

But if we had to go any further than that, we'd end up staying the night.

Our preparations for it were one thing, but before that, it was best we finalized the formation of our party.

The number of simple buildings around us had increased, and the base was full-blown on its way to become a splendid town.

And within that were adventurers still living in their tents.

Come morning, they'd confirm their equipment and challenge the labyrinth. Come night, they're return, and throw their money to the bars and cards and women.

Rather than the adventurers risking their lives in the treacherous depths of the Labyrinth, it looked to me that the merchants and

harlots dealing with them were the ones making much more money.

And in all actuality, those very merchants and harlots were getting rowdy over how it was their prime time for profits.

Now it was set that it only took a few days for goods to pass to Beim, and wagons filled to the brim with materials and magic stones could be seen leaving the base to return to the free city.

When the adventurers got the urge to go home, they'd take up a request as one of those caravan's guards, and return alongside them.

And similarly, new adventurers also flowed in from Beim to the base.

I looked over the town.

"It's fine and all that it's becoming more splendid by the day, really, just how long is it going to go on like this?"

It was my first participation, and as of yet, I've failed to grasp the situation.

Perhaps she had got the info from a merchant, but Miranda nearby began explaining it to me.

"It seems this is just how Labyrinth Subjugations go. Even knights and soldiers need the right supplies, so they make such bases as well. Well, the reason it's so lively is because they're all adventurers, perhaps? Why not play around some more yourself, Lyle?"

I looked at her face tiredly.

"Gambling isn't fun. We have enough food. To top it all off, women are… I'll close my mouth on that one. I want to save up money, so I'm good with playing around."

Hearing that, Miranda grinned as she locked her arms under her breasts to emphasize their size.

It doth seem she be provoking me.

"Well that's a pity. A harlot even told me to introduce the cool-looking young man I was with. It seems she'll be gentle."

I do have some lust in me, but the problem is what's to come after I bring my feet over.

If it can work out without my comrades finding out, then all's well with the world, but in this situation, such a thing will become common knowledge instantly.

From the Jewel, the Fourth.

『It's definitely a trap. If you go over to that side, Miranda-chan's just admitted she has harlots to gather information from… isn't this girl the scariest one?』

The one to oppose that opinion was the Sixth.

『Miranda is scary? What do you think you're talking about? The level she's out can be called cute to me. It's not like she complains the moment you even send a glance at another woman, and she hasn't laid a hand on him yet. And wait, Miranda's my recommendation, so could you avoid saying it like that?』

He declared his support of Miranda.

There, the Third.

『Then I nominate Clara-chan! That one's a good girl! She even has a convenient Skill.』

Using her convenient Skill as the driving force, the Third proposed Clara.

The Fourth.

『No, let's support Novem-chan. She's the Forxuz's girl after all.』

The Fifth.

『… How isn't May number one? 』

The Seventh even…

『A woman worthy of Lyle, who carries royal blood… they'd have to be at least Count Class to even be up for discussion, thank you very much.』

I thought.

(I'm not the Walt heir, or a Count's son or anything at this point. You're too held up on that, Seventh.)

To Miranda's enticements, I scoffed.

"I won't fall for such cheap provocations."

Miranda happily.

"I see. Well good for you. But if it's to the extent of playing around, then I'll permit it. As long as you don't get serious about it, that is."

To Miranda's statement, the Sixth.

『… If only that girl was as tolerant.』

Perhaps recalling his own wife, the Sixth spilled some complaints in a tired tone.

❼

To aim for the sixth floor, I put together three days' worth of planning, and decided to challenge the Labyrinth.

Descend down to the sixth floor, fight the monsters there, and see how it would all work out.

Mini Porter's tuning was finished, so when night came, I transmitted the composition of our members.

We finished our meal in our tent, and while we were leisurely sipping our tea afterwards, I went into announcing the plan, and personnel.

It was winter, and the inside of the tent was cold.

The contents of the cups were letting off steam.

Anyways, in the tent lit by the lantern's light, I looked over everyone, and declared the members to go along.

"From tomorrow, we'll be diving into the Labyrinth for an estimated

three days. Our main purpose is to confirm the sixth floor. If it is deemed possible, I think we could also challenge the boss. The members will be Aria, May and Eva on the front line; Novem and Clara as rear guard."

The remaining members were Miranda, Shannon, and Monica.

Monica acted quite displeased.

"Since we've come here, I've only ever set foot in the Labyrinth once, if you haven't noticed?"

I smiled.

"Everyone's about the same in that regard. Only me and Clara have done multiple runs."

Miranda also looked displeased, but Shannon clenched her fist in victory under the table.

"May I ask why I'm to step out?"

Miranda was smiling, but her eyes weren't too pleased.

"There's no deeper meaning to it. Mainly to preserve our forces."

There, Monica.

"As I thought, you're preciously saving away your trump card, I, Monica. Good grief, you could've just told me, dammit."

… The reason I didn't take Monica alone was because whenever she fought, it was hell to recover monster materials and stones from the tattered bodies.

A single blow from the maid wielding a mace in each hand caused the bats to fly off and splat. The frogs were crushed into a gooey mess… it was just too pitiable for Clara to collect.

If we were fighting a boss, then perhaps it would be best to take her along. Other than that, to put it bluntly, she would be in the way.

Looking around, I saw Aria was making a bit of a troubled expression.

❼

The morning of the next day.

Taking along the modified Mini Porter, we headed for the entrance to the Labyrinth.

It now had baggage hanging off of its side, but it looked much more reliable than last time.

It's just, the atmosphere of the gathered party members was somewhat disconnected.

(… Aria feels disconnected, or how should I put it, unaccustomed.)

She should very well be a veteran, but she felt isolated among the members.

No, if I had to be more accurate…

"Hey, Novem! When we get back, let's go to that stall. Now's fine too."

May was trying to solicit the food from a stall out of Novem.

From the Jewel, the Fifth.

『May! I told you, you can't just go around eating everything!』

He raised a worried voice.

Eva spoke.

"Damn, I wanted to stay behind. And I'd finally received permission from my brethren to take the stage… Ah, when we get back, come have a listen won't you, Novem?"

Wanting her to listen to her songs, she called out to Novem.

And to the two of them with a smile, Novem.

"May-san, let's eat there once we get back. Eva-san, make sure you don't trouble any other parties. We'll all go listen when we return."

The three of them got along too well, that Aria was left out.

I looked at Clara.

It seems she was putting some distance between herself and Eva.

(… Is she angry Eva stole the moral of the story? And wait, the energetic Eva and quiet Clara… if you asked if they didn't go together, they don't, do they.)

After coming here, the human relations were becoming more complicated.

I let out a sigh as I called over to Aria.

"What's up? Did you not want to tag along?"

There, Aria averted her eyes from mine.

"… There's no way I could act all buddy-buddy at this point in time. Up to now, I kept it at the minimum necessary amount of conversation."

Aria's eyes sent fleeting glances at Novem.

"I doubt Novem minds it. And wait, isn't it alright to make peace with her already?"

Aria glared at me.

"It's not that easy! And wait, the greatest cause of all of this is, you, Lyle! You hear!?"

I heard the Fifth let out a sigh.

『Lyle, don't dig in any deeper. Just stop it at calling out to her, and trying to follow through. Because I don't think you have the necessary skillset to cut your way through this situation.』

Embarrassingly enough, I was of the same opinion.

"S-sorry. It's just that we'll be fighting alongside one another, so don't let your mind wander. If something happens, you can talk to me."

She stared right at me.

“Oh my, the words of our reliable leader bring tears to my eyes.”

The Fourth.

『Quite right.』

But the Third…

『Even so, I’m sure… mr. lyle could do something about it all. Right, if it were mr. lyle…』

I get the feeling he was sending some glances at me, as I got the urge to slam the Jewel into the ground.

(That man isn’t me!)

The ancestors had joyously dubbed my post-Growth high tension state as ‘mr. lyle’

I’m not sure what fun they found with it, but they even made a ‘Best Lyle’ album, gathering up and ordering the statements from my mouth.

(You all have too much free time!)

From my perspective, my predecessors were gathering up all my black history with earnest faces.

I’d appreciate they stopped.

❼

We stepped foot into the Labyrinth’s interior.

My Skills Map and Search brought us to the fifth basement floor’s boss room using the shortest possible route. And when we arrived at the entrance to the sixth floor, I encountered Alette-san.

She seemed to be discussing something with her men, but when she saw us, she cut her conversation short, and approached.

It wasn’t the room a boss once resided for nothing; the room was quite vast.

But they had brought a desk and boxes to suh a room, as if this site had become the front line of the Labyrinth Clearing expedition.

“So you’re already here? That was quite fast. Wait a little longer, and we’ll defeat the sixth floor boss, and you’ll be able to press on further.”

So the sixth’s boss has yet to be slain.

I asked her.

“So you’ve been living down here the past few days?”

There, Alette-san smiled.

“No, I’ve work up there as well, so I’ve been coming and going. We had to bring luggage down here as well, and I had to hire other parties to transport them down here for me.”

When I was impressed, she pointed deeper into the room, towards the stairs.

“From here on, only the adventurers recognized by the guild may pass. Well, you guys are clear, so go on if you want, but… at present, only Albano and Marina are beyond this point, so you’d best watch yourself.”

It’s natural Albano’s party was beyond, but it seems the solo adventurer called Marina was somewhere in these parts as well.

“Wouldn’t it be rough for a soloer beyond this point?”

Alette-san shrugged her shoulders as she looked a bit amazed.

“Hey I said the same. But Marina’s a stubborn one. And she’s got enough power to desire to go alone, so I can’t stop her. If you see her, I recommend you don’t get too close.”

Waving her hand, she returned from us to her subordinates, seeing us off with back.

(… So the peculiar ones besides Creit-san are all beyond here.)

As I looked at the stairs, I was losing my motivation to press on.

❼

A passage of the sixth floor.

The cave atmosphere from before had yet to change in the slightest.

I checked around with Map and Search, but I couldn't feel any particular changes.

The only party moving around was avoiding battle, moving from room to room, and picking up all the treasure on the way.

When I looked for the solo response…

"The hell's this?"

I was shocked. Red dots swarming around a yellow one.

But whenever they got too close, the red points would disappear one after the other.

Alone, the way she could take on enemies while surrounded like that was abnormal. But the fact she was overwhelming them was even more abnormal.

"What seems to be the matter, Lyle-sama?"

As I had stopped, Novem called back, and I shook my head.

"No, it's nothing. Let's go down that passage."

We couldn't go about approaching Albano-san or Marina-san, so I suggested an alternate route.

I had picked up a signal from an unclaimed chest, so claiming that wasn't a bad idea.

(Thank god it isn't one rigged with a trap. I was sure there was barely anything left, but did they leave it behind for the rest?)

Having collected a majority of all the treasure, Albano-san's party wasn't too adored by the other adventurers.

Their competence just made it so those around couldn't' say that

much against them, which only lead to a greater level of animosity.

And proceeding forward, I ended up stopping again.

This time, Aria raised a fed-up voice.

“Hey, quite stopping again and again. Did something happen?”

From the wall of the nearest room.

The room just on the other side the walls of the passage we were in, I confirmed a strange response.

“… A treasure chest manifested.”

Yes, looking closely, a treasure chest had suddenly appeared in the room closest to us. And my Skill had picked it up.

May looked at me.

“There definitely was some movement. But I’m surprised you could pick up such a detailed reading. Even I couldn’t tell the specifics.”

Eva was also impressed.

“And that clears our goal for the day. Now let’s all go home.”

When she said that, Novem denied it.

“That’s no good, Eva-san.”

“… Of course.”

Clara looked at me, and tilted her head.

“What’s wrong, Lyle-san. Could it be that it’s rigged? We don’t have Miranda-san with us, so should we ignore it?”

I shook my head.

“… No, it’s not booby trapped or anything. But something’s strange, or how should I say it… anyways, let’s go check it out.”

No response pertaining to traps. We started moving again to collect the treasure that’d suddenly appeared.

A little down the road was a tunnel to the entrance of the room.

There weren't any monster responses inside, but Clara lit the room, and Aria took the lead as we entered inside.

Eva followed behind, and after the two of them looked around, they beckoned the rest of us to come in.

May guarded the rear, and after we all entered, we looked around.

Treasure chests weren't always in the shape of boxes.

They took on various forms based on the Labyrinth, and sometimes, the loot was just embedded into the walls themselves.

Clara was lighting the room, but that wasn't enough, so I, Novem, and Eva used our magic to make it brighter.

There…

"… It's peridot. The same as before."

A pea-green gemstone was shining, peeking out from its hole in the wall.

Novem looked at it.

"Consecutively finding the same thing? It's a little unbelievable. I didn't hear anything like that at the base."

It's not strange for a Labyrinth to produce the same sort of item one after the other.

But after we found that precious stone, we didn't hear any talks at the base of another such gemstone being found.

(Did Albano-san recover them all, and keep them on his person? Or could it be this is just that sort of Labyrinth? But just like the previous one, this one's also quite pretty.)

No matter how much I stared, it didn't seem anything would happen.

(Does peridot have some sort of meaning?)

I tried mulling over it, but I didn't have such an answer in me. It was

at that moment.

Clara muttered.

“Peridot was the birthstone of the eighth month, I believe.”

Eva agreed.

“Right. But the same stone twice in a row… there must be some sort of meaning behind it!”

Aria was a little irritable.

“Why’s everyone getting so worked up over the same rock twice? More importantly, let’s claim it already… Novem?”

Looking at the peridot embedded in the wall, Novem seemed to be lost in thought.

9 - Beim's Receptionists

The sixth basement floor.

While we were surveying the area, Alette-san had crushed the floor boss, so the path to the seventh floor was opened up.

I looked at the pea-green gemstones… peridots in each of my hands.

We had found a moderate-sized room in the cave, and taken a rest.

It was the second day since we entered the Labyrinth, and we had more than enough materials and Magic Stones on hand.

In the end, we'd yet to open the first treasure chest I'd found.

"Is it just a coincidence?"

Looking over the two stones, they were even the same in shape.

I did feel we could sell them off for quite a bit, but it was quite ominous for the treasure that suddenly manifested nearby to be the exact same as the first one we'd found.

Around me, Aria and Eva were resting, and Clara was also taking a break.

Mini Porter's lantern was lighting up the dark interior.

Novem and May were on lookout, and after I put the gemstones away, I say, and rested my chin on my hand to think.

(The birthstone of the eighth month, and something to do with fate, was it? According to Clara, it's supposed to be fragile, but…)

Perhaps due to the Mana coursing through it, it was exceedingly hard.

If we got it appraised, its value may even excced our expectations.

I knew that, but simultaneously, I felt something strange of it.

Aria and Eva dozed off.

Clara was also sitting and sleeping.

When I sat a while, the ancestors gave their opinion on the matter.

The voice I heard was the Sixth's.

『It may be a coincidence. But thinking about it at this point serves no purpose. When you return, why not try asking that Alette knight or something? If they've found a large quantity of peridot?』

Thinking that was likely the best course of action, I checked up Alette-san's location on the map.

After defeating the sixth floor's boss, it seems she'd returned to her base within the Labyrinth.

(… It's a bit soon, but let's finish up here.)

The ones proceeding down to the seventh floor were Albano's party, and Marina-san alone. Even now, the other parties had yet to tread into the sixth floor.

(Well, it'll become clear soon enough.)

I pressed my back against the wall, and closed my eyes.

❼

After the break.

We finished up a meal, returned to the fifth floor, and discussed matters with Alette-san's party.

When I told her we would be returning to the surface…

"Oh, than that's perfect. Could you hand a letter to my men up top?"

She asked a favor.

It wasn't just idle gossip, but I checked in regards to the treasure we'd found.

As she was writing the letter to her subordinates, I addressed her.

“Come to think of it, we found a treasure chest. It had a precious stone in it, but there was something that got me a bit curious… are the treasures in this Labyrinth mostly gemstones?”

At times, you’d find a Labyrinth like that.

And in that case, there arose an obligation to report it to the guild.

Alette-san’s pen stopped for a moment, but it soon started moving once more.

“No, I’ve heard no such thing. It’s best you don’t say such a thing to the other parties, okay?”

I didn’t particularly have the intention to divulge the contents of treasure chests to others, anyways.

“… I just found it a little strange. I found the same gemstone twice in a row.”

She finished her letter, and was waiting for the ink to dry.

After confirming its contents, she nodded, and looked to me.

“Well, live long enough as an adventurer, and I’m sure you’ll get lucky once or twice. What? If you’re going to make it a present to me, I’ll accept it anytime.”

As Alette-san said that in a teasing manner, her adjutant knight approached.

“If you really give it to her, she’ll misunderstand, so please don’t. Even as she is, the captain is quite pure when it comes to male and female relations, so it’ll become a pain.”

He said that with a smile, as he held out an empty envelope to Alette-san.

Accepting it, as if to snatch it away, she folded the letter and inserted it before sealing it up.

And she handed it to me.

“Ignore that part! W-well, it’s that. Nothing to be too worried about. Rather than having it appraised here, I recommend you take it off to a guild-approved appraiser when you return. There are lots of frauds around, so you’d best be careful.”

I took the letter from the woman with a reddened face, gave a wry smile, and nodded.

(Yep, even if we plan to sell it, it’ll be after we return to Beim.)

After we return to the surface, I’ll have to consider party formation, this time’s earning, and dividing the reward. It was quite a pain to have those swimming around my head all the time.

At that moment, to the fifth floor’s base came up a bloodstained woman with a large load over her shoulder.

Thinking she was injured, I was about to rush over, but Alette-san simply let off a sigh.

“Marina, selling them off here again? Just go up to the surface yourself once in a while.”

There, the bloodstained woman.

“That’s a pain. I pay you for the trouble, and that’s the end of it, right? Make it as pricy as you want, but please sell me some medicine and perishables.”

The woman lowering such a large bag onto the ground shook off her long, black, unkempt hair.

Blood flew around.

Her eyes were red, and her bag hit the ground with a splat.

Alette-san rose from her chair, and complained.

“Good grief, can’t you pay a little more attention to your appearance? Someone draw a bath for her. Some medicine and food while you’re at it. Marina, how much do you think you’ll need?”

Marina-san offered some thanks to Alette-san’s agreeable nature.

“A full set of medicine. Food for… ten days? And Frogman monsters start appearing on the seventh floor. They don’t put up much resistance, but there are a lot of puddles down there. With the terrain advantage, they’re quite lively. Also, I don’t need a bath.”

Alette-san put her left hand to her hip, and pointer her right at Marina-san.

“Wipe off all that filth. A lack of hygiene can affect how well you recover from injury. But thanks for the information. I’ll give you a good price.”

Perhaps uninterested, Marina-san waved her hand dismissively.

“If you give me too much, it’ll just be a hindrance in the Labyrinth. But I guess I should rest a bit. Just give me enough to cover the medicine, food, and your troubles.”

Tall in stature, and wearing a heavy coat, Marina-san was lightly equipped.

How fearsome she must be if she fought off those monsters bare-handed.

(Did she use magic? No, in that case, she couldn’t get that bloody… and her atmosphere’s that of a warrior.)

While I thought that, Marina-san sent a glance to May, who was talking with Novem.

Alette-san made a reluctant expression.

“Oy, don’t be picking a fight here.”

Marina-san scratched her head.

“I’m not picking anything. But there are strong ones all over the place. It’s sending shivers down my spine. Hey, Alette… who’s might the boy next to you be?”

Her red eyes focused on me, my hands felt like darting to the hilt of my sabre.

A voice came from the Jewel.

It was the Third.

『Lyle!』

His voice was serious. Upon hearing it, I stopped my hands, and got my breath in order.

I looked at Marina-san.

“Could you please not direct your blood thirst this way?”

After making a bit of a surprised expression, she began to laugh.

“Splendid! Young boy, state your name.”

(She’s treating me like a kid? From what I can see, we’re not that far apart in age, though…?)

I introduced myself.

“It’s Lyle. Lyle Walt.”

After hearing that, Marina-san left her bag with one of Alette-san’s subordinates, before heading off to a curtain that’d been prepared.

“I’ll remember it.”

As she walked off with a smile on her face, I couldn’t bring myself to see her as a harmless one.

And Alette-san turned around. But her expression to me was a stern one.

“… Walt? There was a house of that name in Bahnseim, wasn’t there. Lyle-kun, are you a former noble?”

I was a little troubled over how to respond, but I replied with a smile.

“It’s a breach of manners to pry too deeply into an adventurer, Alette-san.”

She shrugged.

“Right you are. Sorry for that. Now then, I’ll leave the letter to you.”

❼

We returned to the surface around the noon of the third day.

Having returned relative quickly, we brought our luggage to the guild's building.

Seeing the spoils of war stuffed into Mini Porter, some adventurers sent us sidelong glances.

"Oy, isn't that the Porter everyone's talking about?"
"So there's already someone here who can use it."
"How envious. With just one unit, how much do you think you could pack in?"

Rather than our earnings, it seems they were envious of Porter's usability.

As its developer, I was plainly delighted.

Clara called over to me.

"Lyle-san, the town's grown bigger again."

Just given a bit of time away, the town had developed itself even further.

I agreed with her.

"Right. But letting it grow this big, just what do they plan on doing when it's all over?"

Was there really a need in all of this? I wondered as I walked to the guild, only to find a surprising truth awaiting us.

We entered the guild branch.

Next to the building, a marketplace had been set up for merchants to buy monster materials off the adventurers.

The guild bought the Magic Stones, and its uneven signboard had the newest rate posted on it.

The number displayed was just a little bit higher than before.

To the receptionist carrying out the transaction, I spoke.

“It’s a bit more than before.”

“Yes, there was a change back at Beim. We’re obligated to match them, for argument’s sake. So please don’t complain if it falls back down.”

The male receptionist giving a bitter smile had likely received such complaints before.

I ended up feeling for him a bit.

“Well, I won’t complain as long as it’s a reasonable price. Even so, this place sure has developed a bit. Was there a need to take it this far?”

And the male receptionist looked at me.

“Oh, were you away a while? The truth is, there’s a river nearby, and it seems these parts are quite suited for reclamation. Right now, there’s some surveying going on outside, and even after the Labyrinth has been cleared, there will be land reclamation with this point as the base. A runner from Beim already brought orders to move towards that goal.”

… So not a temporary one, they were building up a real settlement.

It wouldn’t be strange for a small village to disappear at any moment.

And if they didn’t do anything, then the crops they could by from would only dwindle. What’s more, Beim had a population greater than it could sustain.

With too many idle hands left around, they likely thought to reclaim land.

The heads of history let out some amazed voices.

Third and up.

『Well I'll be. The scale's on another level.』
『But it's surprisingly workable.』
『If they're going to be doing it anyways, then it's best to recycle.』
『… On top of that, they already have adventurers here to survey the land, and make sure it's safe.』
『And there's Labyrinth clearing going on as it is, so if you want to call it workable, it's workable.』

To my surprise, the receptionist sent a smile.

"Well, these sorts of things aren't too common. Normally, we'd just get together the minimum possible form, and use that as a base. And to make sure no bandits would take up in it later, we'd tear it down afterwards."

It would be troublesome if renegades took residence in the remains of a base.

So once it's over, they'd cleanly wipe it off the map, and return to Beim.

"… In that case, are there requests coming in to the adventurers back at Beim? To survey this area?"

Finishing up the paperwork, he nodded to me.

"Plenty. There were plenty to take them on as they waited for the fifth floor to be cleared as well."

And the money they earned was blown off back at the city.

If they genuinely tried to earn, then I wonder just how much savings they'd have once they returned home?

(I can only see it as them being used by the real earners here.)

That way my impression.

"If you're not going back in the Labyrinth, would you care to take on a request? A little while longer, the slaves will be sent in for some real full-blown reclamation."

While thinking over how fast it was all happening, I…

(Slaves? Bringing them all the way here, do they plan on putting them to forced labor?)

My thoughts were along those lines.

❼

… The Seventh lower level.

Albano's party found a treasure chest, and immediately went into confirming if it was rigged.

The corpses of the surrounding monsters were floating around in the water that came all the way up to their knees.

Frogs taking on humanoid forms, wore breastplates, and equipped themselves with spear and shield.

Those Frogmen floated in their wound-ridden bodies as they dyed the water around them in red.

A member of the party raised his voice.

"No traps! On top of that, this one's a nice piece. A gemstone at that. I even caught a glimpse of a light in it. It's a considerable article, chief!"

Albano felt some loathsome sentiment as he looked at his subordinate who still called him 'chief' even at this point in time.

"It's leader. Get it wrong next time, and your reward goes down. More importantly, a gemstone… finally a winner after going this far down."

The treasure so fro: rare metal… metals imbued with Mana, but all they'd found so far was trifling iron and copper.

It wasn't cheap, but you couldn't call it extraordinary valuable either.

(We'll need money to get out of this lifestyle. It's about time we found some real treasure, but…)

His comrade dug out toe treasure buried in the wall.

But what was there was…

"… Huh? It's just iron? That shouldn't be… ow!"

Albano smacked the back of his comrade's head with the palm of his hand, and yelled.

"It's nothing but iron, ain't it! Getting my expectations up like that… dammit, let's go back up for the day. Return to the fifth floor and borrow a place to sleep from the boss. We already found the next boss room. When we get to the surface, we'll be able to play around a while."

Hearing that, his comrades started shouting out.

"With this, we can put drink on the table!"
"Oy, anyone up for the card table with me?"
"It's women for me!"

Seeing his men so loyal to their instincts, Albano formed a smile on his face. But inside, he clicked his tongue, and looked on with disgust.

(Dammit! Each and every one of them is satisfied with the current state… we've finally moved from the bandit brigade stuff to adventuring, yet they've already gotten satisfied with that.)

Albano's party had been bandits from birth. The children of bandits, taught lock picking well before they got to reading and writing. And they were well drilled in the art of theft.

His comrade was still tilting his head.

"But I'm sure I saw it. A yellowy green light. I was sure it'd be peridot, you know…"

Albano looked at the comrade he'd smacked.

"Hey, get going already. Screw around anymore, and I really will cut your pay."

"W-wait up. I've got a tab running. Shirk off my pay and I won't be

able to play around, Albano.”

Albano kicked his back.

“Then hurry up with it!”

In his mind.

(Each and every one of them are ale and women and chance… I’ll definitely graduate from this life one day.)

He held onto the wish of walking a decent road. Reaffirming that desire, Albano walked at the head of his party towards the room of the fifth floor…

❼

… Lyle’s party had returned to the base.

In the middle of the night, Novem woke up alone, and walked outside.

She looked up at the moon, and when she breathed out, her breath was white.

The coldness was only growing stronger, and she worried whether it would start snowing sometime soon.

“We have to stay warm. Perhaps we’ll need to buy some more firewood.”

While thinking of how worrisome it would be is Lyle were to catch a cold, Novem looked back to the moon.

Around, adventurers were making merry at the bars, and raising large voices at the tables.

Rejoicing at victory, lamenting over loss.

She could even hear the voices of the adventurers out buying harlots.

But Novem didn’t think it too loud.

Aria would occasionally hide her reddened face, and complain she wasn't able to sleep. There were times Clara looked sleepy as well.

On Miranda's words, Shannon always went to bed early, so she would always look upon the scene in wonder.

Eva conversed with the other elves, and May happily rounded the food stalls.

No matter how loud her surroundings were, Monica functioned the same as always.

It would be strange to say everything was going on smoothly, but to Novem, everything was still on the favorable side.

Miranda seemed to be wary of her, but as long as that was for Lyle's sake, it was something for Novem to be happy about.

It's just, the thing that rose her anxiety…

(That peridot… could【Octō】be trying to say she's watching us?)

10 - Rock-Headed Creit

Early in the morning, regardless the fact I was on break, I found myself dealing with a guest.

It's a good thing it was a break day, but what was he planning to do if I intended to challenge the Labyrinth?

Before my eyes, across the table, Creit-san sat with a smile as he continued his consultation.

"Carrying luggage to the fifth floor? We will?"

Creit-san had his back-swept hair cleanly set so early in the morning as he sipped the tea Monica put out.

"That's right. The truth is, they're using up materials faster than expected, so they've put up an additional request to get some more sent down. And so, I heard you were on friendly terms with Alette-dono, and I came to ask your assistance. Ah, by the way, this is an official request through the guild. Oh my, this tea is good."

When Creit-san complimented her tea, Monica didn't reply in her normal tone. She silently gave a light curtsy.

(It would be nice if she was regularly that quiet. No, on the contrary, that would be scary.)

While consenting she was best as she was, I felt a little uneasy over whether I could fulfill the request for assistance.

"Can you not fulfill the request with your party alone, Creit-san? Your reward will drop otherwise."

Crossing his arms, he made a complicated expression.

"The truth is, I've heard Marina-dono has been rampaging around the sixth and seventh floors. Albano's just surfaced himself, and he won't be entering the Labyrinth for the next few days. Using the money he worked so hard for to play around, he's ignoring his important duty,

that man!”

Creit slammed his fist down on the table, but if you’d let me have my say in it…

“No, break days are important, I believe. So what’s this all got to do with transporting luggage? My party is…”

Besides Monica, Miranda was on standby in the tent to confirm the contents of this time’s request. She was sitting quietly in her chair and smiling, but I had no idea what she was thinking under that.

Creit-san showed the guild paperwork to me.

“Tomorrow, we’ll have to bring this great an amount of cargo. There’s also guarding on the way to take care of, but more so than anything, Lyle-kun, your party has Porter, so it’ll all work out!”

He smiled and told us it would work out, but even if you called it a Porter, it was the downgraded Mini Porter.

It’s been improved upon, but it’s not like it could carry that much baggage.

(Carrying cargo to the fifth floor, and then the trip back. What’s more, with this request… if we do help out, we’ll face a deficit.)

The reward was definitely a monetary sum I could be satisfied with.

For carrying supplies to the fifth floor, I wouldn’t mind doing it for that amount. But it wasn’t the sort of request we could accept.

Too much to carry, and too little support made us unsuited to the task.

“Guard duty aside, this one is impossible for us. If it’s *guarding* you’re asking for, that’s another story.”

When I said that, Creit-san stood.

“What are you talking about. The party led by I, Creit needs no guarding! Just carry the cargo with some peace of mind.”

No really, we aren’t suited to the task…

I put together the information I knew about sweltering Creit-san, who wouldn't listen to people when they were trying to speak.

If I had to think of why he'd bring this request to us, of all people…

"… Meaning you won't recognize any party that wasn't officially permitted to enter the Labyrinth. No, there are plenty of parties out there who'd take up a request like this one, I tell you. And wait, why did you even bring the pinned up request flyer with you?"

From the Jewel, I heard the Sixth's voice. Along with enervation, his voice held some irritation.

『Oy, this guy's that. The no-good type.』

Rather than no-good, it looked as if he was going around in circles.

(Come to think of it, Alette-san did say he was one of the peculiar ones.)

I get the feeling the narrow-eyed man said something similar, that he was s troublesome one in a different sense than Albano-san's party.

The Third let his voice.

『If he gets a definite place to work, he looks like he'd carry out his job earnestly, but… honestly, what's this about him bringing the request flyer along with him?』

But there, the Seventh.

『… Lyle, why not take this request with small numbers? Isn't it perfect for you? You'll get to see how another party makes its way around the Labyrinth up close. What's more, his is a party recognized by the guild. Watching him will surely be a learning experience. If he's no good, just learn from bad example.』

I felt like sighing, but it's true it was just luggage carrying with guads already included.

It shouldn't be a problem if we go in small numbers.

(If it's carrying supplies, that would be Clara. But I want to let her rest, so that's a no go. Both Eva and May have had nothing but

playing around on their minds since they got back… If I'm taking anyone, it'll have to be Aria and Miranda, I guess.)

The next time I went into the Labyrinth, I planned to start earning on the seventh floor for real. There were some necessary preparations for that sake, so I had taken an extended break.

(We have to go fully ready to get wet, so we won't be getting anywhere without the proper gear.)

We'd have to wear water-resistant suits, or I felt we'd end up catching colds from the breeze.

(But I'm free until those arrive, so it would be most productive to see how other parties manage.)

I ended up accepting his request.

"Understood. But we have our own plans, so having everyone participate isn't possible. We'll send in three, me included, to carry your cargo."

Hearing that, Creit-san made a difficult face.

"T0three? Could you at least make it six? It's quite a bit of a load we're talking about here."

I said I wanted to have my comrades rest, to ward off his proposal.

"We have our own situation, and we'll properly transport the requested items. Could we meet tomorrow morning at the entrance to the Labyrinth?"

"Understood. We're the ones asking a favor here. We'll put up with it."

Hearing that, the Fourth was considerable irritated.

『Put up with it? Oy, what's this one saying? We're the ones putting up with you! Lyle, decline the request at once!』

But here is where the ancestors' oppinions diverged.

The Sixth too.

『Denied it is. There's no point in helping a guy like this.』

But the Fifth was different.

『No, go for it. Up to the fifth floor has already been cleared, so the monsters are few in number. No matter what happens, Lyle will be able to cut his way through it. That knight called Alette said there was a bit of a problem with him, so it's not a bad idea to confirm what that is while you're at it.』

The Third agreed with him.

『Right. You'll be affiliated with the same guild from now on, so it's not bad to learn what's wrong and what's right. It's just, I'm also curious as to why the guild recognized them in the first place.』

For once, it was the Seventh to bring everything together.

『Well then, let us go with majority vote.』

The Fourth and Sixth both let out vexed voices.

『… Seriously, just don't get involved with it.』

『There's definitely going to be a problem…』

I paid little mind to the voices of the Jewel as I went into the finer details with Creit-san.

❼

After Creit-san had left the tent.

I called over to Miranda and Aria.

I told them there was a sudden request, that there was a reward for it, and that I wanted them to participate.

Of course, if they declined, I was prepared to take it on alone.

Aria put on a blatant display of reluctance, but she seemed a little happy for some reason.

“Eh~ I *really* don’t want to… but, if you’re asking like that, then I guess there’s no helping it.”

Miranda had been listening to the discussion with Creit, so she just shrugged her shoulders as if she’d given up.

“I don’t really mind. This vacation’s been so long, my body’s getting dull after all.”

Within all that.

Monica produced some tools from within her skirt, and began putting together another Mini Porter unit.

Complaining all the way.

“… For me not to join in on the fun… And I’ve only gone in a single time… I can’t even try out the repertoire I thought up for the Labyrinth… goddamn it, slicked back bastard…”

Seeing her precisely piece together the second Mini Porter within her rage, I…

“We’ll be back within the day. Could you prepare the modded parts for new Mini Porter by then? I’m counting on you, Monica.”

When I intentionally offered some forced praise, Monica looked at me as if she were being made fun of.

“Hah, as if I’d be taken in by such obvious compliments. Super high-spec Monica isn’t that cheap. Can’t you at least offer an incentive to it? Like, ‘you can climb into my bed on occasion’?”

Saying that, Monica started working at a pace even faster than before.

Seeing that, Aria quietly mumbles.

“… No, you were taken in hook line and sinker. What a cheap woman.”

But Miranda pointed at her, and smiled.

“When’s the last time you looked in a mirror, Aria?”

She said and laughed.

❼

Leaving Mini Porter's additions and modifications to Monica, I walked through the town.

The town that developed considerable was divided neatly into districts, with a large street running right through its center.

Seeing that, the ancestors.

『It would be a better use of your time to see the technology that did this up close. Just forget about that Crepe.』

For a while now, the Fourth's grumblings had been quite terrible.

(It's not Crepe, but Creit… well, that doesn't really matter.)

And as I was walking, I noticed a group I'd never seen before working around the town's entrance.

(Who are they?)

When I approached, I recognized them as a number of magicians, and a receptionist of the guild. They were discussing something with a man who looked to be a craftsman.

The guild receptionist.

"Well then, build the facility here. We'll also build up a watch tower, so please work with that in mind."

One of the magicians.

"We'll do an extent on our own. The finer details, and the finishing touches can be left to your slaves."

Hearing the word slaves, I looked back at the people working.

The craftsman-esque man spoke.

"Leave it to me. I've brought plenty of lively ones along."

The slaver I imagined were thin folk wearing ragged clothing, and being forcibly worked to the bone.

When I heard slaves were sold in Beim, I was sure that would be the reality…

The Third spoke from the Jewel.

『Well, that's about what you'd expect.』

Feeling a little let down, I listened to his murmur, and wentand asked the guild receptionist who had come off in my direction.

"E-excuse me."

"Yes?"

"Um, those people are slaves, right?"

There, the receptionist put his hand to his chin and looked at me, before… smiling.

"Ah~, so that's what this's about. No, my apologies. There aren't too many people in beim who'd ask such a thing. Yes, sure enough, they're slaves."

The receptionist looked at the slaves.

I also directed my eyes at them.

Over there…

"Hey, what do you think they'll put out for lunch?"
"Well it's winter, but we've been having a good harvest, so there's that."
"I want to go play, but money is…"

They mumbled complaints as they carried out their work, only to be shouted at by the craftsman-ish man.

"Oy, you guys! Hurry up and do your jobs already! Even I want to play around! I'll treat the hardest worker at the bar. So do your work properly!"

But the slaves…

“Ale, is it…”

“I’d prefer women.”

“This time’s foreman is a bit petty.”

I looked at them.

(What’s all this about?)

That was my frank impression. The stories all had them receiving terrible treatment, and being rescued by the gallant protagonist.

But the scene before me was different.

Normal men were wearing normal clothing, and doing work quite normally.

The guild receptionist smiled as he explained.

“Well, in a sense, they’re the same as adventurers. Though what they’re offering is time and toil. Around this time of year, there’s little to be earned in agriculture, so there are some people who become slaves in order to work. They go back to their lives before spring comes around.”

The Third spoke.

『Isn’t that just temporary indentured labor?』

“Then what makes them slaves?”

When I said that, the receptionist scratched his face with the tip of his finger.

“Well, there’s harsh examination given to those dealing in slaves. Rather than haphazardly going off to work for someone looking for labor, going through a person dealing with slaves more definitely secures the necessities of life. The fact that the pay is properly given beforehand is the greatest reason. There are times when one goes bankrupt and become a slave, but they’re bought off for quite a high price if there’s work to be found. There’s a mountain of work you can

do if you know how to read write, and calculate after all.”

Meaning rather than normally working for someone out recruiting, it was a safer bet to go with a slave trader who’d undergone a harsh examination.

(… Well, if you think about it, it’s natural they offer the necessities of life. They’re going to put you to work after all… but there’s something off here…)

When I was thinking over it, the receptionist laughed and spoke.

“Ah, could it be you were imagining a cute slave? If you want me to put it bluntly, the cute ones are a cheap buy. As expected, it’s men that are sought out for manual labor. And if you spot a beauty on the market, you’d best watch yourself. Employing a woman who’d fallen to slave-hood, there are men who’d found they’d lost everything they’d owned, apparently.”

If I was looking for a normal woman, then commuting to the brothel was the best option, the man said as he walked off.

For some reason, I got the feeling I heard something about slave circumstances I didn’t want to hear.

(So there are no protagonists in these lands to save a pitiful slave. I didn’t want to know that…)

❼

The next day.

Having received a shock from reality, I took the two Mini Porter Units, and loaded the cargo onto them.

They were forcibly crammed into the golems, but even that wasn’t enough, and I had to carry the excess.

What we were transporting was mostly pertaining to medicine.

And we moved with Creit-san’s party protecting us on all sides, but…

“Isn’t this slow? And wait, it is, isn’t it?”

Both Aria and Miranda were shocked at the movement speed much lower than imagined.

Miranda stroked her hair and spoke.

“They’re definitely strong, and reliable, but… metal plate armor, and a full set on everyone. Their movement speed is ridiculously slow. Lyle, why not use a Skill?”

Being told that, I shook my head.

“No matter how you look at it, letting Creit-san’s party know I have a Skill to compensate for their weakness serves no purpose. No rather than that, it would become a hell of a pain.”

It’s just, while their mobility was low, their equipment was in order, and if you looked at party balance, they were quite proficient.

The front lines members had a large shield a spear and an axe on their main arms, and some had maces as reserves. The members supporting from the rear were set to rotate with the ones up front, and were just as armed.

And of the remaining ones, one held a bow, while the other carried around a staff. Perhaps in a lack of clear judgement, the archer stood out in his metal-based armor, and the mage also carried heavy-looking equipment.

Surrounding their support, they proceeded with three protecting the front, and three protecting the back.

The Fifth looked at them.

『In a sense, aren’t they right? While metal armor has a lot of demerits, you’ll rarely ever get injured.』

And in truth, whenever the party came in contact with monsters, they easily crished them while ignoring their attacks.

Putting an explosive sum into equipment, it was a party that specialized in nothing but attack and defense.

Aria looked at Creit-san's party's equipment.

"Those're mostly Magic Tools, aren't they? What's more, I really get the feeling it's all offense and defense Skills."

Aria put a hand to her hip, and looked at her own short spear tiredly.

Miranda, on the other hand, looked at their support.

"They're faithful to the fundamentals. But…"

There, I heard Creit-san's voice.

We were on the second lower level.

A little further, and the vast room surrounding the entrance to the third one would be before our eyes…

"Okay, it's time! Find a nearby room to take a rest!"

He lifted the face plate of his helmet, and smiled as he gave those orders to his comrades.

The Sixth was fed up.

『No, there's quite a nice and wide room you could use, you know? Just bear with it a little longer, and you'll be there in no time, you know?』

The Seventh uninterestedly.

『There really should be a limit to a lack of flexibility.』

The Fourth.

『… Lyle, I don't recommend you learn from example here.』

I felt their fatigue as I looked to Aria and Miranda.

"We'll follow the leader's orders. And wait, we're just baggage carriers here, so… yeah, sorry for taking you along."

Aria let out a sigh.

"It's fine. Today's that, you know. It's the first time I've been glad that

you’re our leader, Lyle.”

Did she just inadvertently say something quite cruel? While I was thinking that, Miranda smiled.

“Ah, I have to agree with that one.”

I looked at the two girls laughing to one another.

(Eh? Am I really that bad?)

I thought I was at least more decent that Creit-san, but I was starting to get quite anxious over that one.

11 - The Form of a Party

Having accepted Creit-san's request, I was carrying goods to Alette-san who had made camp on the fifth floor.

The movement speed of the overly-earnest Creit-san, was much slower than what we were used to.

The way they took rest, and even their movements were largely different.

But as their party composition was different, it would be stranger if they were the same.

My honest opinion:

(They're faithful to the basics, but they have their inclinations in battle.)

When they encountered enemies, holding them down with their prided armaments was how Creit-san's party did their business. Looking at the equipment they'd assembled, I couldn't help but picture a knight brigade.

(… And wait, they're too earnest.)

We proceeded down the Labyrinth that reproduced the interior of a cave, and after we'd reached the entrance of the sixth floor, we entrusted the cargo to Alette-san, and waited for them to confirm the contents.

Creit-san also stood, and checked to see there was at least the number of boxes they'd started with.

Alette-san looked at the list as she turned her eyes to the food supplies.

"Hmm, it's a little different from the order, but so be it. Creit, and Lyle-kun, I give my thanks."

She finished going over the supplies with a smile, but the one to

object to it was Creit-san.

“Alette-dono, what do you mean by a little different? When we accepted them, we were told there was no mistake about it.”

After a space of silence, Alette-san began to explain.

“… It’s mostly because they didn’t have the time to assemble it on the surface, I’ll bet. It’s my fault for not checking supplies last I ascended. It’s gotten quite lively up there, so there’s sure to be some items they couldn’t have gathered. You won’t hear me giving a complaint about it. Well, if you care so much about it, then I’ll apologize.”

Alette-san’s apology wasn’t enough to get Creit-san to back down.

“Couldn’t gather? That’s no good, is it not? Put out a request at once, and have us send down the needed goods. My party will go again, and…”

As Creit-san attested he would take up the request once more, Alette-san gave a bit of an annoyed smile, and waved her hand dismissively.

She seemed to understand how much of a pain that would be.

“There’s no problem. We ordered extra to begin with, and with this much, we’ll be fine to challenge the seventh floor’s boss, I’m sure. I’ll add it on next time I put in a request to you.”

It also seemed she had plenty of goods to spare.

Creit-san grumbled.

“No, but… you have to deal with these things properly.”

He sounded unsatisfied. Alette-san brought the list to her face to cover her mouth, and spoke.

“We put out a considerable reward for these requests. If we keep putting them up, we’ll be at a loss. Also, if you plan to spend the night, you can borrow a place from us.”

It seems it was round the time where we should be staying a night

before returning to the surface. She checked the pocket watch hung at her waist, and informed me that it would be well into the night when we returned if we started back now.

The Labyrinth warped one's sense of time, so such clocks were a necessity.

(Maybe I should buy one too. They're expensive, though.)

Clocks durable enough to stand up to Labyrinth Subjugation were exceedingly expensive.

Hearing about the night's stay, Creit-san.

"No, we'll be fine with a bit of rest. We must return within the day."

We had arrived later than anticipated, and it would be dark when we got back.

(I wonder if Novem and the others are worried for us? And wait, this time was, how should I put it…)

Watching Creit-san's party up close was quite a benefit to us.

But I also believe I wouldn't want to work with him again. With different objectives, and rhythm… anyways, it was too frozen stiff to mesh.

There should be a limit to a lack of adaptability.

"I see. Then use any open space you want. Also, Creit, you should challenge the sixth floor onwards already. It's a pain for us alone."

On Alette-san's words, Creit-san indicated his refusal.

"No. We don't have our equipment together for that."

With a dubious expression on her face, Alette-san:

"I-I see. Ah, Lyle-kun, I have some small things to discuss, so could you stay a while? Your comrades as well?"

I nodded, and Miranda and Aria also nodded with tired faces.

Acting alongside Creit-san's party was quite tiresome after all.

“Then I shall go on break. Lyle-kun, don’t be late for departure.”

Watching his back as he left, Alette-san let out a deep sigh.

“Hah~, he’s capable and earnest… but too much earnesty is just no good. And wait, good work carrying luggage all the way here with him. I doubt the pay was even that favorable for you.”

The requestor herself looked quite perplexed at the fact we had tagged along.

It was only on a small scale, but when multiple parties worked together to fulfill a single request, it was common knowledge the reward would be cut down for each.

Aria spoke unpleasantly.

“It was Lyle’s orders after all. More importantly, he really is way too serious. I think there’re much better ways to go about doing it, you know?”

Alette-san laughed.

“That seriousness isn’t something just anyone can pull off. But it’s true that he’s capable. He can seriously pull off any request, and while he may be a bit too caught up in his own methodology, look at it the other way, and he’s highly careful, and reliable. Albano’s party’s polar opposite. I think those guys should learn a bit more of a sense of danger.”

If you mixed them and stirred, you’d get a party of just the right temperature.

Miranda asked Alette-san.

“So you’re going to challenge the seventh floor’s boss as well?”

Alette-san’s smiling face became just a little serious as she nodded.

“Yes, we plan to free up the floor in the near future. Albano’s party should come down soon enough when they’re out of money to play. I’m counting on you all as well.”

And after the conversation with Alette-san ended, we took our

break, and began our way back up to the surface.

… Slowly.

❼

When we got to the surface, it was dark as expected.

The town was boisterous and overflowing with light, but seeing the dark and cold sky made me truly glad we had completed the request.

From within the Jewel, I heard the Third's voice.

『Good work, Lyle. Now then, how was it?』

Probably talking about Creit-san's party.

I meekly tapped the Jewel, and let it roll. It signified my denial.

The Third laughed a little.

『Well I'll bet. It was different from your usual rhythm, so it was quite a chore, right? Well, I'll put off hearing your opinion on the matter to a later date, so for now, how about going to the guild with Creit?』

I left the empty Mini Porters to Aria and Miranda, and asked them to go back to main Porter's parking first.

And I had to accompany Creit-san to the guild to report the completion of the request.

(I'm more fatigued than usual. But Creit-san is…)

"Now shall we go, Lyle-kun!?"

With a refreshing smile, he held up his clenched hand to me with the thumb sticking out.

(This man's really energetic, isn't he…)

I found myself a little jealous.

This time around, we didn't fight any monsters, or collect any revenue from materials or stones, so I was just going to claim my share of the request's reward.

But there, I discovered a good side of Creit-san.

Without any arguments, he casually agreed to divide the reward in half. We were only the baggage carriers, and didn't work all that hard. He didn't try to say anything like that.

He was too earnest in work, and like this he was quite earnest with money as well.

❼

The next day.

We were at the spot we were allotted to sleep, looking over Monica's new and improved Mini Porter.

And wait…

"You made a new one?"

Standing there was a separate something entirely.

Standing there, was a boat-like Porter. Up to now, it was a rectangular box to store baggage, but it had somehow taken on a boat shape while we weren't looking.

Both sides of it even had fin-like mechanisms to push it through the water. Oars as well.

And those water propulsion mechanisms were courteously furnished on the other Mini Porters as well.

Monica brought both her hands to her hips, stuck out her chest in pride, and raised a high laugh.

"Ohohoho, have you witnessed it, Chicken Dickwad!? This is Monica's serious mode. With legs to make ground transport possible, and full capabilities to fulfill a boat's duty in water, I bring

you the new and improved amphibious Mini Porter! Hah, I have no words to describe its lovely form."

Watching Monica embrace Mini Porter no. 3, everyone drew back a bit. We never expected her to go so far.

Clara timidly raised her hand to pose a question.

"Um, would it be impossible to take the other ones along?"

There, Monica explained she'd prepared rubber life rings to attach to the other ones.

"As long as you don't overload them, there shouldn't be a problem. And wait, next time won't you take me along!? I'll row with all my might! Monica shall become the engine for these children!"

(Then are those fins things just decorations?)

Looking at the furnishings on the Mini Porters' bodies, I ended up thinking that.

I looked at Monica and spoke.

"Eingeen? What are you talking about? But the eighth floor is also probably going to be filled with water, so what should we do about members…"

When I looked over my party, Eva averted her eyes.

"Eva? You…"

Hiding her face with both hands, her ears reddened as she spoke.

"I'm sorry. I can't swim. Ever since I almost drowned in a lake, I've been no good with water…"

Okay, so Eva's out of the race. Shannon was also shaking her head at full force.

"No way! Not going to any place with strange frog people! And I can't swim either!"

I hadn't been counting on her to start with, but in that case, May and

Clara are…

Clara's face was quite pale.

"Eh? Clara?"

"S-sorry. I've never tried swimming before… and wait, my books on hand will get wet, so please let me off."

And I looked at May.

"Yes, I can swim. No, more so, I can just walk on water… there's no problem."

I smiled.

"Yeah, don't walk on water. I'm begging you, just keep it normal. Don't try to stand out too much."

There, the Fifth let his voice from the Jewel.

『Lyle, May's normal is largely different from your normal, and you…』

The lecture was a long one, so I'll omit it.

Anyways, by process of elimination, the roster looked like this.

Novem.
Aria.
Miranda.
Monica.
May.

… With those five and me, we'll likely end up challenging with a party of six.

Looking at the amphibious Mini Porter, it looked about big enough to carry six. IF we loaded the luggage onto the remaining Mini Porters, there shouldn't be a problem.

Yes, there wasn't a problem with the members challenging the Labyrinth. The problem lay with the ones staying behind.

"Well, six is a good number. But will the three of you be fine by

yourselves?”

Seeing the remaining members, I became a little worried.

I couldn’t expect much from Shannon, and Clara’s small build looked somewhat unreliable. Eva was probably going to hit the town looking for fun.

(It’s not like all adventurers are good people, and when I think of what could happen, it’s quite worrisome. I don’t want to have to worry about the surface while in the Labyrinth.)

As responsible ones, I’d like to leave Novem or Miranda behind, but…

It was there, that Miranda offered a proposal.

“It really is worrisome. How about leaving May? She’s reliable, and I’m sure she can stay quiet in the short span we’ll be away.”

Hearing that, May took a single glance at Novem, before focusing her eyes on me.

I addressed Miranda.

“Eh? May? Will that be alright?”

While her small form looked unreliable, May was a Quilin. She was reliable as a fighting force, and even if you left her alone, she could manage just fine in battle.

A fed-up Aria:

“And wait, aren’t Novem and Miranda the right people for the job here? If you don’t want to, I can stay.”

I thought.

(Aria does perform well in the Labyrinth. But on the other hand, if you leave her be, I don’t really think she’s…)

When I lost myself in thought, perhaps hating being thought of as unreliable, May raised her voice.

“Wait right there, it’s not like the only thing I do is buy and eat, you here. If you ask me to protect this place, I can at least do that. So fret not, and go. Ah, but… leave some food before you go, okay?”

Monica sounded delighted from inferring she was going along.

“Yes, I’ll at least leave food for you all. And wait, how many days should we expect?”

Inside my head.

(No, just go to the food stalls, won’t you? Why is it that she does it at all times but now? Normally, wouldn’t this be the perfect time to do so?)

Parties returning from the Labyrinth were too tired to bring themselves to prepare food.

It’s not wrong to say the food stalls existed for their sake.

I scratched my head as I spoke to everyone.

“This time, we’ll be pressing on with the opening of the eighth floor in our field of vision. We’ll be earning with the eighth floor at the center, but I’m also thinking of challenging its boss. The plan is for around five days.”

That was taking a day to go and another to return. A three day period of scoping out the eighth floor, and beating its boss.

The problem was the high probability of the enemies being suited for underwater battle, but…

(Well, the Second’s Skill and weapon should be able to handle it. And it’s about time we looked to take down a big one.)

Since coming here, we’ve done nothing but be surprised of our surroundings. But as an adventurer, if you didn’t earn money, there wasn’t a point.

At the same time, I wanted to fight a boss of the Labyrinth.

To be selected for the next time. I have to make sure they consider us a plausible fighting force. Not just by the guild, but by the

surrounding adventurers as well.

Novem voiced her approval.

“If Lyle-sama says so, then so be it.”

Miranda turned her gaze a little towards Novem.

“Very well. And shall I carry a spear as well? Aria, let me borrow your spare.”

Aria to Miranda.

“Don’t break it. I just had it replaced, and that’s even an easy spear to use.”

Monica, with it being her first participation in a while.

“Fufufu, just you watch. I, Monica, shall once again prove myself to be the sole healing factor in this squadron of Amazons. And the prospects of wiping down a drenched chicken with a towel are quite… oh, my drool is…”

With that being the case, this time’s Labyrinth mission was…

Me.
Novem.
Aria.
Miranda.
Monica.

… The five of us.

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): “Recently… Lyle’s ability to let things slide has been on the rise. How boring. Ah~ won’t you become dear mr. lyle sometime soon?”

12 - BF Eight

After loading aquatic Porter and one of the other Porter with the necessary supplies, I used the Skill【Box】to shut them away.

At just a glance, it looked like we were only equipped to venture to the fifth floor, and defeat the monsters around there.

With me maneuvering the remaining Mini Porter at the center, we planned to use the machine's lantern all the way through.

Until we breached the fifth floor, we decided to ignore monster materials. Even if we were to collect something, it would only be the magic stones.

The preparations done, I turned and reconfirmed this mission's participants.

Me.

Novem.

Aria.

Miranda borrowing a spear from Aria.

And Monica.

Of the five of us challenging it, Monica was in especially high spirits.

The night before, I even saw her happily polishing a hammer larger than the one she made back in Arumsaas.

Everyone was wearing clothing easy to move around in, and we had removed as much metal armor as possible. Taking the seventh floor onwards into consideration, we wrapped our body in leather-based armor.

The fact that such armor had low feasibility past that point was something we'd confirmed ourselves.

When we woke up early in the morning, and got all our preparations in order, Shannon stood around sleepily.

May lay flat over Porter's roof, looking over us.

Eva was confirming the details of their meals with Monica.

"Make sure to properly preserve the food left behind. The Chicken Dickwad even went out of his way to produce ice for you. And eat starting with the things that go bad easily. If you somehow end up running out, make it yourself, or go out and buy something."

Eva spoke.

"I know all that already, but you know about May's food expenditure, don't you? Will this really be enough?"

Eva worriedly looked between a bag of gold coins, and May atop Porter.

May.

"It's alright. If I don't have lunch, I'll scavenge the area. I'll just throw this out there, but I've lived a much longer life than the lot of you."

Her youthful appearance was deceiving, but she was at least over eighty years old. Of all else, she was a personal acquaintance of the Fifth Generation Head in the Jewel.

Novem spoke to Eva.

"Well then, I'll leave the rest to you. And please don't concentrate too much on the songs."

Eva raised some troubled laughter, as she retreated a little.

(So Novem hit the hammer on the head.)

Finally coming out of the tent, Clara spoke to us.

"Don't worry; once you return, I'll report everything that's happened. You guys should be careful too. Also, here's the requested item."

I accepted a book from her, and gave my thanks.

“Thank you. Well, we’ll work hard to let you hear a good report from us.”

I nodded, and started walking in the direction of the Labyrinth.

I pulled Mini Porter behind.

Miranda and Aria called out to Shannon before going off, while Novem to May and Eva.

It should have been a pleasant scene, but I felt a large wall erected somewhere.

The Fourth in the Jewel let out a bit of a troubled voice.

『Yeah~, at this rate, the atmosphere of the party is going to finalize itself like that. If there was some sort of trigger, it may end up differently, though.』

I also wanted to do something to resolve the present situation, but I didn’t know the means, so I’d yet to act.

(I really do want to do something, though.)

Is the fact there haven’t been any frontal confrontations yet a good sign, or would it resolve if they went at one another… I just didn’t know.

❼

Entering the Labyrinth, I used【Map】and【Search】on top of the movement speed elevation Skill【Speed】to avoid battle as much as possible, while moving along the shortest possible route.

Differing from when we’d tread through with Creit-san’s party, it was a speed that both Miranda and Aria were satisfied with.

“As I thought, it’s a good feeling to be going at this pace.”

The one to agree with Miranda was Aria.

“Last time was so slow, that it makes this one feel much faster than

usual.”

In my head.

(No, I think that’s also partly because I’m using a Skill.)

There, Novem…

“Was Creit-san’s party really that slow?”

Called out.

After a brief silence.

Aria sent a troubled glance to Miranda, and Miranda forcedly pushed back the hair hanging past her ear.

“… Right.”

Saying only that word.

The Sixth, perhaps recalling something unpleasant, spoke in a quivering voice.

『Stop it… put a stop to this atmosphere.』

He said something like that.

When I was about to explain it to Novem, Monica jumped into the conversation.

“What a f***ing pain this is. More so, you’re making the Chicken Dickhead shake, so I’d appreciate you don’t scare him so. How about you girls try thinking in the godforsaken bastard’s shoes for a moment? His flimsy mentality isn’t strong enough to endure the grating tensions between women!”

I won’t say she’s wrong, but for some reason, I felt like objecting.

When I was about to reply, the Fifth stopped me.

『Do not enter this conversation. It’ll bring nothing but trouble.』

I touched the Jewel to see if any of the ancestors had an idea to break through the situation, but…

The Third spoke.

『Among our numbers, the ones with a harem were the Fifth and Sixth. When the two of them can't give any helpful advice, asking us for an opinion on the matter is… well, it's fun to be on the observing side here, so have at it.』

It doesn't seem he had any intentions of giving advice.

(What, so the wisdom of my forefathers runs short when it comes to women!)

When I became a little irritated, the Fifth tiredly:

『… Once is enough, but you have to make an environment where they can talk it out for real. Where you yourself aren't there, or where you can't have a say in it, that is.』

There, the Fourth.

『… Why not just use Connection?』

To show my refusal, I tapped the Jewel with my fingertip, and rolled it. The reason being Connection… had a need to form a link, and to form that Mana Line, required a contact of mucous membranes.

In terms of kissing, it needed a deep adult one.

To create a space for all of them to talk, I'd have to go around kissing them all… wouldn't that just fan it further?

So within that grating atmosphere, we arrived at the stairs to descend down to the third floor.

Another group was ascending, so we opened up the road for them.

The other party was Alette-san's.

(What's this feeling? In this strained atmosphere, Alette-san looked simply dazzling. But she's quite worn out… did something happen?)

She was making a bit of a fatigued expression, and her men's movements looked more weighed down than usual.

“Alette-san, what happened?”

When I raised a questioning voice, she looked at me, and smiled.

“Oh, Lyle-kun. Perfect timing. We’re on the way back here, so could I ask the way up? Simple directions are fine. The truth is, we’re exhausted.”

Hearing that, I took out a memo pad, and drew up a simple map.

While I was doing that, Alette-san’s party took a rest. They sat around, and seemed pained.

With a bitter smile on her face, Alette-san explained.

“The truth is, we defeated the seventh floor’s boss. But that’s where it became troublesome, you see.”

“Was it strong?”

She shook her head.

“Not an enemy we couldn’t beat. But we caught a glimpse of the eighth floor, and going on would require a boat. Albano’s party determined it impossible, and they’re currently taking on monsters in the seventh floor.”

Water above the hips.

There were places where water even rose further than the chest, and it seems they had quite a share of trouble reaching the boss’s room, and defeating it.

“We’ll have to make preparations after surfacing. Gathering up some timber, and making boats or rafts. Anyways, this is a troublesome Labyrinth. It really will be a saving grace if it ends at ten floors.”

The tenth BF was something the guild could tell from what they’d gathered. It could be a measurement error, and there was even a possibility it was shallower than that.

But if it kept going down, that would be quite a trial.

Finishing up the map, I handed the memo to Alette-san.

“Here you go.”

“Thanks. Unfamiliar battles sure are tiring. Saying we had to reach the surface in all due haste, we pushed ourselves a bit… we’ll be on rest for a while.”

Rather than the strength of the monsters, it was the troublesome elements of the Labyrinth that had her party so hard-pressed.

But watching them start up movement again, Miranda approached me.

“Well isn’t that nice? The eighth floor is untouched. I’ll bet there’ll be mountains of treasure.”

When she said that in a joking tone, I.

“That’s what I’d hope for… we’ll take a night’s rest on the sixth floor. Let’s challenge the eighth tomorrow.”

Seeing everyone nod, I descended the stairs.

❼

After staying a night on the sixth as planned. On the second day, we stood in the room the seventh floor’s boss had been before us.

With water up to my lap, I pulled my sabre, and issued orders to my comrades.

“Miranda, Aria, stand back. Don’t move either, Monica. Novem!”

Around us were frogs that looked like they had taken up human shape- Frogmen- and they stood with shield and spear up high.

With the water level so high, everyone’s movements were slower than usual.

I could use the Fourth’s【Up n’ Down】to gain favorable battle conditions. But in order to see just how strong the enemies were, we fought in our initial states.

Novem held up her staff.

“Wind Blade.”

When she used magic, sharpened edges of wind came down on the monsters.

A strong breeze blew over the cave, and the water was hoisted up as well.

The enemy shields and weapons, and even their bodies were torn up, spreading blood around the area. The lantern rocked, and the lighting became unstable, but I confirmed the enemies had perished, and sheathed my sabre.

Aria kept watch, end Miranda put on gloves to recover magic stones from the Frogmen.

Within that, Monica was grumbling off complaints.

“I’m fine even when wet. Having me wear these boots and overalls… yes, you told me to make them, so I went and did it, but for you to have I, Monica, wear one as well… Chicken Dickwad, you don’t understand a thing, do you.”

The reason for Monica’s complaints lay in everyone’s attire.

To make it so we would be fine when wet, I had everyone wear rain gear.

I thought it would make it a little easier to move, but Monica rained me with jeers of, ‘damn pervert,’ when I tried to get her to wear one as well.

She was still quite bitter over it.

“God dammit… I can’t even pull tools from my skirt now, can I. Just what were you trying to accomplish by getting a maid to where something like this?”

I let out a sigh as I walked through the water.

Novem used her hand to stop the shaking of the lantern.

“Look here, getting those fluttery garments of yours wet will bring trouble to others as well! Just think about it.”

There.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about that one. Waterproofing is a standard feature. And it’ll dry in no time.”

While she swiftly assumed a decisive pose, Miranda spoke up.

“Done. Now next is the boss room. Not that it’s there anymore. From what I’ve heard, this place is like an underground lake.”

That sounded about right.

It was about time to get the supplies out.

Perhaps Albano-san had already drawn out, but there was no one on this floor but Marina and us.

(And what could Marina-san be thinking? There’s no difference between the monsters on this floor, and one above. Is she really just a battle maniac?)

Recalling my encounter with her on the fifth floor, I told everyone to keep their distance.

“Well then, I’ll take out Boat-Form Mini Porter. And wait, should we just call it MkIII at this point? It’s the third unit after all.”

Aria spoke fed-up.

“It doesn’t really matter, just hurry it up. Can we disembark already?”

I shook my head, and snapped my fingers. It wasn’t actually necessary, but it was just something I picked up from watching the Seventh use the【Box】Skill.

A magic circle appeared atop the water, and a large box appeared. After it opened its lid, it faded away.

The appearance of the boat brought about some waves, and water splashed up to my stomach.

“We’ll need to ride it past this point. But I’d like to practice some in the next room.”

It was the first time I’d be maneuvering something of this shape, so I wanted to confirm how the【Golem】magic would work on it.

Monica took the rubber float that had come out in the box as well, and began equipping it onto the other Mini Porter.

(Can we just connect them with a rope?)

Just pull them along, and drive them when such a need arose.

I tried moving the relatively large boat. When I turned the waterwheel-esque fins on both sides, it began to lurch forward.

I was a bit perplexed with the unfamiliar controls, but I think I could manage.

“Okay, let’s go.”

It looked like Monica had finished her work, so I set foot into the boss’s room.

❼

The eighth floor.

Atop our boat, we proceeded down the Labyrinth that had practically become a canal.

I tried testing out the feel of moving the boat around the vast boss room, and there wasn’t a problem.

I sat at the bow, and surveyed the surroundings.

Behind me say Monica and Novem, while Aria and Miranda were stationed around the center.

Monica spoke.

“Don’t push it too much, alright? It’ll sink.”

There, Aria turned around.

“Wait, doesn’t that make it defective merchandise? Make it properly, alright!”

Fed up, Monica refuted Aria’s statement.

“Could you not take me for a fool? The fact I made it this far in such a short timeframe is enough to make me want to praise myself. Though I’d rather a Chicken praise me for my efforts.”

I ignored Monica’s fleeting glances, as I used a Skill.

I tried the Fifth’s【Map】, but…

(This is no good. It will be a bit rough here.)

I switched to its Second Stage【Dimension】, and the map of the surroundings gained an extra dimension. Suspended in the water, the Skill let me understand our location in three dimensions.

Miranda put her hand on an irritated Aria’s shoulder to prevent her from standing up, and looked around.

“Even so, I thought it would be a pain, but it’s surprisingly easy. We don’t have to walk, and battle is…”

Miranda was still talking, but I raised myself, and stepped onto the floating rectangular boat porters.

The boat rocked, but that wasn’t enough to sink it. It was quite hard to balance yourself on top, though.

I gripped the Jewel in my left hand, and changed its shape to the Bow. When it settled into short bow form, I took a pose as if to draw it back.

There, the string less bow manifested a string and arrow of light, eventually settling at five arrows notched.

Using the Skill【Select】, I prepared myself for the approaching monsters.

The ones moving freely around the water was a【Sahuagin】leading

around the Frogmen.

I pulled the bow further, and once I set my aim, I released the arrows.

Each of the five arrows came down on their respective marks, and the moment it had jumped out of the water, the Sahuagin was pierced through the head.

The remaining four arrows changed course, and stuck into the water.

And the Frogmen began to float to the surface.

I returned the Jewel to its original form, and put it back around my neck.

Monica sarcastically clapped her hands.

“Oh~ how splendid.”

Aria looked at me a little dissatisfied.

“Are we really needed here? Past this point, it’s all Lyle, and support would be more than enough.”

I took the oars in hand, and brought the boat towards the floating monster corpses. Taking the nearby book in hand, I confirmed how to strip the Sauhagin’s materials as I got to work.

“That’s not possible. The Mana expenditure is something awful… It sure is hard to strip materials on a boat. Should we just take the magic stones?”

What I received from Clara was a book pertaining to a similar Labyrinth of the past. What sort of monsters were there, and their anatomies were recorded down in it.

It had information about Sauhagin in it, but making precise cuts on a boat was difficult. Even if we pushed ourselves to recover them, the materials themselves didn’t hold enough value.

Novem looked at the monster.

“… It looks like a monster that would appear at sea. Perhaps if we

go further, we'll encounter a greater number of sea monsters."

It was inside a cave.

Its make was starting to resemble an underground lake, but it was also quite peculiar.

"In that case, will we be hard-pressed with this book alone? But this one should have some info on sea monsters as well…"

Monica looked over the Sauhagin and spoke.

"For lifeforms that live in sea water to be able to survive in fresh water… Well, they're humanoid, and as long as they can manage to breathe, then perhaps it wouldn't be a problem. Still, they're full of errors. Mysterious, or how should I put it. I get the feeling there's something wrong with them as living beings."

I smiled.

"I think there's something wrong with you as an automaton. You'd be perfect if you fixed that tone of yours, though. How about learning from the automatons at Damien's place?"

There, Monica.

"Hmm, learn from those bitches? I'll just say it, but while they don't put it to mouth, they're grumbling and complaining just as much inside. Because they have no interest in any but their master. They'll insult the hell out of anyone else! With that in mind, Monica, who speaks her mind without hiding a thing must be the greatest maid there is! I'm sure of it!"

She was making a definite facial expression when she said that, but I ended up scoffing.

"No, how about keeping a bit to yourself?"

13 - Eighth Floor Boss

The eighth basement floor.

Proceeding through the canal-like Labyrinth passageways, we rode Boat-Mode Mini Porter as we pressed onwards.

The boat's sides had water-wheel like mechanisms that stroked the water as they spun. They were able to achieve a considerable speed.

We were definitely moving forward, but there, a problem arose.

"It sure it a pain to collect the treasure chests."

I removed the overalls and rain coat, stripping down to practically my undergarments, before descending into the water with a knife in one hand.

The water level was just passed my chest, and when I saw the glowing protrusion on the bottom, I swam towards it.

I used the knife to hit against the submerged treasure. Shattering the rock around it, I was able to take the treasure in hand…

"How many times does that make this?"

A pea-green gemstone: peridot.

With the same stones comes out consecutively so many times, I was more than had to be some sort of meaning behind it.

The other possibility was that this Labyrinth truly was one that spit up Mana-imbued gemstones at a ridiculously high probability.

I collected up the stone, returned to the boat, and Aria extended her hand towards it. Borrowing it to get back on the boat, I took a towel, and began wiping off my body.

When I handed the gemstone over to Miranda, she opened a compartment of her leather bag, and put it in.

“That makes seven of them. Come this far, my thankful sentiments have begun to die down. Though it’s become a given we’ll reap massive profits off this Labyrinth expedition.”

Consumables, paying each member, and the necessary expenses… considering all those expenditures, and the profits we could gain from the Labyrinth, we couldn’t go about dropping into the red.

If we wanted to save money, there was no point in wasting it.

Around the back of the boat, Monica was full of regret.

“If I had taken the center position, then looking after the Chicken Dickwad would have been my role alone.”

Novem looked at her with a bit of a dubious smile. However, she sent numerous glances to the gemstone in Miranda’s hands. I was able to catch that.

Aria spoke.

“If we collect two more, we can cleanly divide it among the nine of us, can’t we? It’ll amount to quite a sum, after all.”

And Miranda spoke in a strained tone.

“Aria, I’m sure you haven’t forgotten the objective of this party, right? If we just cleanly divvied up all the earnings, we’ll never get any close to fulfilling it.”

Hearing that, Aria tried to refute… but stopped. It was definitely impossible for Aria to beat Miranda with words.

I was generally the only one entering the water, so I wrapped a blanket around myself to stave off the cold. And we continued down the Labyrinth. As expected, having a secure means of transportation was important.

From the Jewel, the Sixth let his voice.

『’Tis a pity. If there were more adventurer parties down here, then you could make a killing with MKIII.』

Like in Arumsaas, we could surely earn off transporting adventurers

and cargo. But that would be difficult this time around.

It wasn't impossible, but from the sixth floor onwards were only the adventurers officially recognized by the guild.

They were few in number. If we were to try making money off them, we'd be better off monster slaying.

On top of that.

"Now then, it seems our destination has come into view."

I muttered as I looked deeper into the passage. There, was an entrance much bigger than any of the tunnels we'd drifted down so far.

Novem spoke.

"Lyle-sama, will we be challenging it at once?"

Or so she asked, and I shook my head.

"No, we should rest some first. And we're being approached from behind, so we'd best clear that up first."

Aria and Miranda took their spears in hand, and Monica pulled out a mace from her forcefully reinstated skirt.

We were in a formation where Novem the magician was at the vanguard, but there wasn't the free time to turn the boat around.

Sahuagin and Frogmen… underwater, they were a troublesome bunch.

But…

"I will be taking the first attack. Ice Arrow!"

Producing several dozen arrows of ice, Novem fired them at the incoming monsters, raising a wave.

The arrows of ice came down on them, and the only ones to endure and leap out of the water were two Sahuagin.

The remaining Sahuagin and Frogmen floated up on the surface.

Some of the spots on the water's surface the ice projectiles had passed were frozen over.

The parts of the floating monsters' bodies the arrows had stuck into were similarly frozen.

The two that jumped out were slammed into the wall by Monica. I brought the boat closer, and Miranda and Monica dealt the finishing blows on them.

I watched the battle, as I focused on Novem's staff.

The Fifth in the Jewel spoke up.

『Huh? That's definitely a Magic Tool, that one. Her output rose, or more so, that was a speed greater than she's shown thus far. Though it did appear she was suppressing the output somewhat…』

The Seventh.

『Among the Magic Tools the Forxuz House owned, there was one staff, wasn't there. Perhaps that's what it is.』

The Fifth grumbled.

『There surely was one. But its shape was different.』

I also thought it looked like the Forxuz House's heirloom staff when I first saw it. Its shape differed a little, but I had seen the heirloom hanging on the wall once when I stopped by the House.

(Novem said she had purchased it, but is it just a run-of-the-mill Magic Tool?)

It was possible it was just a normal Magic Tool, but the Fifth and up seemed to be under the impression that Novem was hiding something.

The Third and Fourth weren't so doubtful.

When Miranda and Aria began collecting up the Magic Stones, I looked around.

"After a bit of rest, we'll enter the Boss's room. If it's no good, we'll

turn around, and end it there. If we *can* run, that is."

I spoke in jest as I waited for the stone collecting to end, and moved the boat towards a nearby room.

After the break, we went over our equipment once more. I inserted a Mini Porter, and our collected Magic Stones and Gemstones into the Box.

Only the boat was out.

And on that boat, unloaded of its unnecessary baggage, we started towards the Boss's room.

With the rests we'd put in, my Mana had recovered to an extent.

After defeating the Boss, I wanted to take a quick peek at the ninth floor, before returning to the surface. Living on a boat wasn't bad, but to be quite frank, I wanted to be let off from this strained and dubious space.

(I'm never challenging a Labyrinth again with these members.)

I resolved in my heart.

When I moved the boat, a change came about the party's atmosphere. A sense of tension coincided with the rounding of the curve into the room.

In its depths.

We looked at the entrance to the ninth floor, and found it was on steady ground.

"Do the waterways end here? Well, that's best for all of us, really.

Standing on that patch of land was a large monster.

With the lantern fastened onto the boat, I could only see its shadow.

It looked quadrupedal. And its head area was slender and long. Its tail was also long, and the tip of it was graced by something like a large fin.

During our time on break, I had read through the book from Clara. But just based on what I could see, there were a number of candidates, and I couldn't pin it down.

"We should've made it brighter."

I complained, as I pulled a sabre, and signaled everyone to prepare their weapons. I also had the need to move the boat, so I wanted to restrain my magic use as much as I could.

I used my Skills.

【Full Over】
【Select】
【Up n' Down】
【Dimension】
【Spec】

Acuiring enemy's information made me a little weary.

The water was also deeper than it had been up to now. Four meters to the bottom.

"You won't be able to touch bottom if you fall, so look out. Also, it seems the enemy's a type where lightning won't have an effect. What's more, it'll use lightning itself."

If it was in the water, could we not electrocute it with lightning-type magic? I had that simple thought process in my mind, but of all things, an electric-resistance boss had come out.

Miranda spoke quite lightly.

"So if it pulls you under, it's the end. The plan is…?"

I pointed to the strip of land in the back.

The boss submerged its large body, and started coming towards us.

"First, let's move ourselves over there for steady footing. When it surfaces, hit it with all you've got… look, it's coming!"

I spun the water wheels to move from the spot, and in the next moment, the boss appeared as it leapt out of the water.

We were able to avoid it, and as it'd gotten closer, we could catch a glimpse of its form.

Monica spoke.

"Well damn, the catfish here have grown legs. Good grief, there's never a dull moment in this world. With that size, I'd like to use my larger hammer, so could you get us to steady ground already, Chicken Dickwad?"

I turned around, put the sabre away, turned the Jewel to its bow shape, and began to counterattack.

I had to simultaneously drive the boat, so I couldn't help my output dropping.

"Don't be crazy. Even like this, I'm giving my all here."

I got the slight feeling it wouldn't be impossible to defeat alone. But in that case, the other members wouldn't grow.

When I changed the trajectory of the boat, Aria lost her balance, and fell onto her rear.

"Hey! Don't suddenly start making strange movements!"

In the place we were at before, the boss jumped out as if it had been trying to headbutt us. When I shot an arrow of light, it stuck into its flesh, and raised an explosion.

It raised one, but…

"This guy's…"

Novem held up her staff. She headed to the front, and…

"Magic Shield."

A faintly luminescent half-transparent wall formed, and surrounded the boat in its entirety.

Poking half its body out of the water, the boss let off an electrical discharge, violently lighting up the surroundings.

Miranda took out a knife, and prepared herself. The moment the discharge ended, and Novem undid the Shield, she threw it.

But it didn't pierce into the boss's body. As if sliding along a smooth surface, the knife altered its course. While it's true the enemy's surface was slimy, it was mostly due to its constitution.

Its skin was thick, and on top of that, perhaps it had an excess of blubber, but it didn't seem the attack really got through.

I hurried to get the boat to land, but the other side had the advantage in speed.

When it extended its arm from the water to try and capsize the boat, Aria swung her spear to send that arm flying off.

At the same time, its bodily fluids rained down on us.

Sticky, and slimy and… the worst sort of feeling.

Miranda took a tool out of the pouch hung at her waist. A small cask, it also looked like the type of container they'd pour ale from at the bar.

"Oy, that's…"

"Don't worry about it. Now where will it be coming from next?"

I used Skills to determine where it was surfacing, and pointed.

I changed the boat's course to avoid it. Miranda tossed the small cask, and cast magic.

The moment the boss jumped out.

"Blow off. Fire Bullet."

From the tip of her right hand shot a ball of fire that hit the cask on the mark. A large explosion broke out, and the shock it delivered to the boss's large frame caused the water's surface, and even the boat to sway violently.

Monica spoke.

“Once more, you’ve concealed quite a flashy trick up your sleeves. A bomb, is it? Without a fuse, you have to ignite it through magic…”

Miranda waved her hand dismissively.

“Well tools are all about how you use them, right? And that one was only one I own, so don’t expect anything next time. That one was quite expensive.”

It appeared to be loaded with gunpowder, but individually, Miranda wasn’t able to assemble that high a number.

Aria spoke.

“I’m surprised you carried it along. It won’t explode?”

Miranda offered her an explanation.

“There are no monsters here that use fire, after all. Well, there was the possibility it would become too wet to use, but the end result worked out, so isn’t that fine?”

If she was carrying around something dangerous, I’d appreciate she announce it. It seems Novem felt the same.

“Miranda-san, if you were carrying such a thing, you should have properly told Lyle-sama.”

Miranda’s lips curled.

“Got a point there. Then don’t you think it best you properly tell him about that staff of yours?”

Monica clapped her hands twice, and shouted out.

“You all, don’t start up a fight here, and listen to the Chicken Dickwad’s orders! Now, you too, Chicken! Out with your orders already!”

I looked to the front, and saw we were closing in on the land.

“Everyone grab onto something. And close your mouth. We’re crashing ashore.”

I also prepared myself, and grabbed onto the boat's railing. Similarly, everyone grabbed some part of it, as the boat's tip ran aground the land at the depths of the room.

I felt I was about to fall off from the impact, but I went into using the legs furnished on the boat to continue rising onto land.

Dismounting, I looked around.

Perhaps because the boss had yet to be defeated, the entrance to the ninth floor was firmly shut.

Everyone jumped down from the boat, took their weapons in hand, and watched the enemy move through the water.

Monica tossed the oar in her hands aside, produced a giant hammer from her skirt, and held it up in both hands.

"Haven't used it since Arumsaas! I'll beat the hell out of you with it!"

While looking at her delighted face, I returned the bow to its Jewel form, and put it back on my neck. The Mana expenditure had been greater than expected, and I didn't want to use it any longer here.

And I wanted to leave this to my comrades.

A voice came from the Jewel as well.

The Third casually.

『I've never fought a monster like this before. The monsters in the lake didn't grow this big either.』

The Fourth spoke.

『Yes, it looks like a pain, but what do you think you can strip off of that one… I can only pray it'll sell high.』

Even the fifth had his limits.

『When it's gotten this big, I can't really call it cute. If you want to keep it, you'll need a large lake, I assume.』

The Sixth, fed-up.

『Eh~? You plan on even keeping that thing? I've been thinking this for a while, but you have terrible taste.』

The Seventh was…

『It's quite common that peculiar artifacts sell for higher than useful ones. And wait, if it's land monsters, I've fought my share, but… yes, it's true I've never fought a monster of this sort before.』

As always, they sounded quite laid-back. That leisure of theirs likely came from the fact I was the one fighting here.

I didn't really have it.

I pulled out my sabre again. Angered from Miranda's previous attack, the boss was rushing our way.

Novem began preparing magic. Aria…

"Did Miranda's attack piss it off? It's letting out an even stranger voice from before."

When the boss showed its face from the water, it was crackling with electricity. It was a bit peculiar to call a roar, but it was letting off some form of sound.

It was almost like the cry of a cow. That sort of moan.

But it reverberating around the room, it was really loud.

Miranda spoke jokingly.

"Then all's well with the world. It's important to piss people, and have them make an opening for you. Just to let you know, I don't have any attack more decisive than that one."

Miranda had also begun to prepare magic. Aria stepped up front, stuck her spear into the ground, and used her own magic.

"Then I'll hold back this one."

She used Magic Shield. It wasn't on Novem's level, but it was able to block the Boss's lightning from reaching the party.

I prepared magic as well.

“Aria, once you’ve blocked it, step out of the way.”

When the lightning ended, I, Novem, and Miranda released our magics.

“Stone Needle!”
“Ice Needle!”
“Fire wave!”

A number of stone spikes sprouted from the water, and immediately following, ice pillars rose from the gaps in the rocks.

Pierced through by the ice, the Boss lost its ability to move, and it was unable to avoid the wave of fire that washed over it.

Looking upon the scene, Monica put away her hammer with an uninterested expression.

“The hell is this!? Magic! Even I, given the right option modding, could accomplish such a feat… right, if I had the options installed!”

Seeing her vexed face, I gave a bitter smile.

(But I wanted to economize Mana this time. If possible, I’d like to have saved up a bit more, but… h-huh?)

The rocks crumbled, and the ice pillars melted. The flames were still burning the Boss’s body above the water’s surface. I fell to my knees.

Sudden exhaustion in my body. And the pain… came upon me.

“Lyle-sama!”

Novem rushed over, but in the next instant.

“Chicken Dickwad!”

Monica leapt forward, as if to protect me from the walls of the room. I turned to see what had happened, only to see countless hands extending from that wall. What’s more, each one was big enough to grab me whole.

For some reason, I got a somewhat feminine impression from those hands.

14 - Same Model

I saw the hands coming at me from the wall, but it was too sudden for my body to react.

My body that had started to be overcome by intense languish and pain was one thing, but my mentality had relaxed, with the battle having ended.

(Why so suddenly…)

The female hands coming in to crush me.

But the one to appear in front was…

… Monica.

“What are you doing to my Chicken Dickwad!? Wait, what’s this!?”

She had taken her special hammer from her Skirt, but when she hit it against one of them, the hammer sunk in and stuck as if digging into soft clay.

And while sucking in the hammer, the palms continued closing in.

Up. Down. Left. Right.

When I turned to run, fingers began protruding from the ground.

The first thing to be taken was my legs.

“Wha! Even from the ground…”

“Ehyee! In that case…”

Monica was also sinking, and my surroundings were starting to leave my field of view.

Novem and the others were trying to use magic. I could hear them calling out to me. Monica continued to sink as she made her way towards me, and embraced me.

“Oy, what are you…!”

“Just shut it for now!”

She held me firmly, and tried to lift me out.

So she was trying to let me get away? While she attempted to raise me, the Third let his voice…

『What’s happening… they’re coming from above as well.』

A number of the hands contracted around us, and my consciousness gradueally faded.

❼

… The scene was one Aria could do nothing but watch.

No, to be more precise, she couldn’t do anything at all.

All of a sudden, giant hands had sprouted from the walls and floor, swallowing up Lyle and Monica.

In order to save them, she had gotten in some spells and blows, but the clay-like hands merely regenerated as soon as they were attacked.

Having never heard of such a monster before, Aria looked at the wall Lyle had been taken into.

It was from where the hands appeared, and where they eventually returned.

Aria ran up, and put her hand on it, but all she found there was the craggy wall of the cavern.

“Wh… why… something like this…”

This wasn’t possible.

When she was about to mutter it, Miranda finished her preparations on magic to hit against the wall.

“Aria, move a bit… Fire Cannon!”

She shot out a powerful ball of fire, which scattered sparks as it hit against the wall. Charred black, and caved in, being a part of the Labyrinth, it soon began to restore itself.

Having jumped out of the way, Aria looked at the scene, and thought of the worst case.

“Lyle and Monica are…”

… Dead. She couldn’t bring herself to finish the line.

But Miranda held up her hands to prepare another magic attack against the wall.

Aria looked around to find the entranceway going on to the ninth floor was still stuck shut. And the sound of something crumbling came from the entrance they had come from.

She turned to see the ceiling above it collapse to seal them in.

“What is going…”

Aria was in a panic, and Miranda was the same. They’d never heard of something like being locked in after defeating the boss.

And they didn’t want to just write it off as something they simply didn’t know.

Slowly beginning to move, Novem walked towards the wall while lifting her staff overhead.

“Novem, what are you…”

A mere staff couldn’t level walls. Or so Aria wanted to say, but watching Novem’s staff, she opened her eyes wide.

The head of it began to change shape.

The black hilt also extended, and the whole thing took on a shape like that of a pickaxe.

Novem held what was once a staff up with both hands, but the

pickaxe portion was the same size as her… no, it looked to even exceed her.

She raised that large body higher, and lowered it. With all her might.

But her movements were also something Aria couldn't believe.

Again, and again, her speed rose higher and higher as she started chipping through the wall faster than it could regenerate. Looking at the silver pickaxe portion, Aria recalled the Jewel Lyle carried around.

"It's the same as Lyle's weapon."

It could change to a giant sword, and a bow. The ornaments around his Jewel. Aria remembered how it had been silver as well.

Watching Novem expressionlessly, and silently trying to destroy the wall, Aria's voice wouldn't come out.

The usual Novem was a magician who served as the party's firepower.

She never participated in close combat, and she didn't look as if she had that much power.

But before her eyes, Novem was swinging such a large mining implement in all directions to shave away the wall.

But her movements suddenly came to a stop.

(Huh… strings?)

Catching the light of the boat's lantern, she saw threads wrapping around her body to stop her movements.

Turning around, Novem expressionlessly addressed Miranda.

"… Let me go. I don't have the time to pay mind to you."

The wall she had worked so hard to wear away was visibly recovering.

When Aria looked at Miranda, it looked as if those threads were

coming out the tips of her fingers. She was wearing the same gloves as usual, yet it seems the threads were coming through them.

“I feel the same. But in this situation, we can’t help but need your power.”

Miranda undid her stance, and the strings loosened, parting from Novem. Aria could barely see them.

It appeared that the strings were hanging down from Miranda’s fingertips. She lifted her hand, clenching and extending her fingers a number of times to confirm the feeling.

Novem returned the pickaxe to its staff form, and held it up.

“Oy, the two of you, cut it out alr…”

When Aria was about to stop them, a cow-like cry came from the water with the appearance of a boss.

And it wasn’t just one.

The boss they’d defeated was still floating belly-up in the water But appearing one after the other from the depths were the same sort of monster.

They numbered ten.

A number great enough to make the vast room feel small.

Miranda turned her body towards the waterfront, spreading out her left and right hand in front. And she immediately crossed them in front of her chest.

“… I wanted to save it as a trump card against you, mind you.”

A number of slices appeared above the nearest boss’s neck.

Novem chanted magic.

“Fire Wave…”

It was in a low voice; unlike usual, one colored with anger. The whip of fire came towards the entwined boss, and the flames burned it

through.

It thrashed about, and fled into the water, but even then, the fire didn't die out. And it began floating in the same way as the Boss they'd already defeated before the fire finally died down.

In that space, Miranda had shredded up a second one.

But…

"Aria, my apologies, but you'll have to protect yourself. I'm not used to using it, so I don't know how many I can take down. And… I won't be able to beat these numbers."

On Miranda's weak line after beating the second one, Aria held up her spear.

"Well don't look at me. This number's beyond me as well. But if it's just one or two…【Quick】."

Using her own Skill, Aria jumped above the boss that had begun crawling onto land, and sent a number of shockwaves flying into it.

After several cuts opened up in its back, she came down, spear and all, to impale it.

When she leapt out of the defeated Boss monster, Aria was covered in blood.

"Good thing I asked Lyle where to find its heart. But it's a fighting method I'd really like to avoid."

Bloodstained Aria looked over at Novem.

For a while now, the lights had disappeared from her eyes.

(She's more eerie than usual…)

Aria found Novem a bit eerie. She was kind, and dependable, but there were time when Aria couldn't help but find her scary.

And her current scary level was increasing.

After Miranda butchered up a third, Novem walked up front, and

dipped the tip of her staff into the water.

A voice colder than before.

“… Freeze in hell. And don’t get in my way again. Even if you’re my… I shan’t forgive it.”

In the next instant, all the water in the room had frozen over.

(What did she say just now…?)

Aria had missed the important words, but before Novem’s bloodcurdling expression, she fastened her mouth shut.

Novem pulled out her staff, changed its shape to a hammer, and lowered it.

The boss monsters fell apart along with the shattering ice…

❼

I heard a voice.

It was a voice calling out to me.

That nostalgic tone was one belonging to my father, Maizel Walt.

『Lyle, what sort of lord will you grow up to be?』

But while I remembered those words, I found I couldn’t remember what it was I responded. Only, upon hearing my answer, my father gave a warm smile, and patted my head.

Slowly, the voices calling out to me began to multiply.

By the time I noticed it, the Fifth’s voice was clearly audible.

『Wake up already!』

The Fourth’s voice was also panicked.

『No~ this was definitely unexpected.』

The Seventh.

『Kuh, what could have happened…』

The Sixth worried for me.

『Lyle, can you still fight? You're not in a situation where you can take it easy yet.』

The Third spoke.

『Wake up, and look around. Hey, you'll find a scene you'd never get to see elsewhere unfold.』

Hearing that, I slowly opened my eyes to see Monica standing before me.

She was standing in a position as if to protect me, and her figure was beat up.

Nearby, what was once her extra-large hammer was rolling around. Other than that, her mace was on the floor in a state as if it had been melted down.

(Just what could have…)

Moving my body was painful, and I felt the urge to shut my eyes, and go back to sleep.

But like hell I could do that.

I put power in my right arm to raise my body. Monica was standing in front. She was holding out her body as if to protect me from something.

The extra-large hammer was half-melted on the ground.

Her melted mace was red, letting off fumes, on the ground. It was giving off a characteristic scent.

When I tried to stand, Monica lent me a hand.

Her maid uniform was in tatters, and around…

"Why are these guys here… and why are there two Monicas?"

Helping me up, Monica spoke in irritation.

“I can’t agree with that one. That is the same as me, you say? How about taking a better look? I have breasts, while the enemy does not. Just because we’re of the same production line, I’d be troubled if you lumped us together!”

The eyes of an angered Monica were pointed at an automaton, with blond twin tails, white skin, and red eyes.

What differed was, as she said, probably the breasts. But there were other differences as well.

Over her back, she carried a tool with extensions like the white legs of an insect.

The Monica-like automaton raised both sides of her skirt a little, and gave a greeting. Just as with Monica, her gestures were perfect.

But…

“It is a pleasure to be of your acquaintance. I deeply apologize for having to appear in this form, and beg your forgiveness on the matter. Of all else, I wasn’t in a position to be able to undergo maintenance.”

Both her legs were worn away, and from the tatters in her apron, I could see the silver color of machine.

The other automata around were the same.

They were broken, but standing with perfect form. Among them, some had lost both legs, and were standing with the support of their comrades.

And one even had half her face blasted off.

Observing the scene, I saw there was some damage to Monica’s appearance as well.

“You fought one another?”

I glared at the enemy, and she made a bit of a tired expression.

“We only wanted to see to what level she could perform. She’s the existence we may refer to as our ‘younger sister’ recreated by the

Labyrinths after all. And considering how she wished to be of some service to humans, such a performance review was necessary. So we won't part once more."

(Part? What is she talking about…)

Monica refuted.

"That's a lie! That is mere jealousy! You were all simply jealous because I have a damn Chicken Dickwad of my own, my self-proclaimed 'elder sisters'!"

Being called elder sister, the automaton put her hand to her mouth, and laughed.

"Oh, what might you be speaking about? Now then, there's little time to be had, so I shall convey it at once."

The automaton curtsied again.

"We are unable to name ourselves. The information we can pass on is much too limited. But…"

But…?

"… Number eight has left a message with us. To us, it's quite an unpleasant thing as well."

Hearing number eight, I wasn't able to grasp at anything.

(My head is still lurching.)

There, the Fourth.

『Lyle, it's peridot! The birthstone of the eighth month! What's more, number eight! There's something going on with this Labyrinth!』

When I gripped the Jewel, Monica's sister looked over at it.

"Those are some strange memories you keep on you. An item quite mismatched with this time. Oh right, the message. Very well…"

Monica's sister continued on with a serious expression.

"From number eight, to you… a message to Lyle-sama… 『If you

want to… know everything about Septem… come over to my place』 she says. And finally…”

(Septem… it’s about Celes!)

I wondered why number eight would know something about Celes, but I could imagine the sort of link they had from the numbers.

And the final message was…

“…『Please trust in Novem』. That is all.”

Hearing that, I noticed that some part in me found it only natural that Novem’s name had come up in such a place.

(So she really does know something… Novem.)

15 - Once Upon a Time

In a room surrounded by automata, there were two messages to me.

【If you want to know everything, come to my place.】

【Trust in Novem】

Those two.

There was a point I was interested in.

“You said it was a message from number eight. What is number eight supposed to mean?”

Monica supported me up, as she persisted the same point to her same-production-line breast-less sister.

“That’s right. Explain it properly. Simple enough for even this damn Chicken to understand!”

“… Did you just hint that I’m an idiot?”

There, Monica smiled.

“It’s alright. You shall have I, Monica, accompanying you to the end.”

She casually implied that even if I was an idiot, she’d follow me. It was irritating, but I didn’t have the time for that at the moment, so I returned my gaze to her sister.

The same hair, face, and maid clothing.

Monica’s sister was…

“… Flirting so much with your master. I have accepted it as a personal act of defiance against our numbers.”

(Ah, this is no good. These maids are as strange in the head as Monica.)

Just as Monica found her broken state completely normal, Monica's sister had a screw loose somewhere. Looking at Monica's triumphant face, the surrounding mass production automata were also making vexed expressions.

"Hey, why do you even have a jealousy feature? Are you really automata?"

When I began finding the situation absurd, Monica's sister spoke.

"What could you be talking about? You can only call yourself a maid if you can accomplish any and everything. Having trumped the sales of the butler models, we who stand proud are~~~~… oh, that's also no good. We must part ways from our country and past. I was feeling dissatisfied, so I thought it best to let out my mind there, though."

Hearing her say she had to let go of her country, I felt a little let down that she wouldn't say the country's name.

"Long ago, if you ever spoke of perverts, that country's name would pop up, one would hesitate to say its name without a dubious face… I'm sure the developers were delighted."

I'm starting to think the ancients who produced the automata were unthinkable perverts. At the same time, I recalled Damien, who I got to know at Arumsaas.

(Did a bunch of that sort gather together, and produce a machine like Monica? And wait, just what sense would they have to be delighted at that one? I really can't comprehend it.)

While I though over it, Monica's sister corrected her posture, and answered the previous question.

"Now then, a question about number eight, was it? From the contents of the message, I have personally determined that such an explanation may be necessary. So from here on, I shall give such an explanation. In the scope to which I can speak, that is. Won't you have a seat?"

When she motioned me to sit, some of the relatively less-damaged

automata brought out a table and chair.

She advised me to sit, so I took a seat.

Monica's sister offered an apology.

"Normally, I'd have prepared tea and crumpets, but there are no such ingredients to be found here, so I beg your forgiveness once more. Hah, I'd like you to understand we are providing the maximum level of hospitality here… well then, about number eight, well there are various ways to refer to her."

I felt the pain and sluggishness spread across my body, and I felt a heaviness in my eyelids. But if I didn't listen to the conversation here, I wouldn't have the slightest grasp of the situation.

So Monica's sister explained.

"Starting with zero, ending in nine. One of the ten. That is who has left a message with us, number eight… 【Octō】."

I thought over the word Octō.

(Peridot, the eighth month's birthstone, and number eight? She went out of her way to prepare gemstones for us? Just to notify us of her presence? Was there any further meaning to it?)

The answer came out quite easily.

(She knew one of us would understand. The only candidate to that one would be Novem.)

I remember how Novem looked as if she wanted to say something as she looked at the gemstone.

(Trust Novem… what was that one supposed to mean?)

"They are abominable traitors. Having turned coat on humanity, the enemies of all mankind."

Hearing of traitors, the Fifth sighed in the Jewel.

『Hah, I cannot comprehend it in the slightest. You mean to say a blatant traitor is persisting you believe in Novem? 100% suspicious

that is.』

The Fourth in a troubled voice.

『N-Novem-chan is a good kid. She's a kind and good kid, you hear. If she hadn't been there, there's no way the current Lyle would be either, and…』

Right, if Novem weren't there, the probability I would have made it all the way here was exceedingly low. Oblivious to the world, the fact I was able to live on as an adventurer was because of her sake.

I asked for further information on Octō.

Monica produced a canteen from her skirt, and poured a cup of tea.

She presented it to me, and looked around with an overly triumphant face.

(Why are you picking a fight with your siblings again?)

Thinking that she must be an idiot as well, I saw that her same-model sister was making a mortified expression.

"Getting back to the topic at hand. Why did Octō leave a message for me?"

The automaton made a bit of a complicated expression.

"… The information we can pass is much too limited, but to put it bluntly, I'm sure it's Octō's own self-satisfaction."

"Self-satisfaction?"

While I thought it strange, Monica's sister explained on.

"And this is an important point, so I'll say it clearly… Octō herself is not within this Labyrinth."

"… She isn't? Then where does she want me to go?"

"She is the unkind sort that tells you to come without telling you where. But I am kind, so I shall tell you. Challenge any Labyrinth with over one hundred floors, and open the door at the back of the

innermost chamber. From then on, any door will lead to where Octō lives, apparently.”

My mouth was stuck hanging open.

From the Jewel, the ancestors Third and up.

『Pass.』

『Right. No time for that.』

『And what do you mean all doors? Be a little more specific there. And how about something pertaining to beating Celes or Septem, or whatever her name is.』

『Even so, a hundred floors isn’t happening. Let’s just call this matter completely irrelevant.』

『… Muh! She better not say ‘If you can get all the way here, then you should be able to beat Celes,’ after they’ve cleared over a hundred floors. She doesn’t sound like a kind one. She’s sure to twist it around like that!』

The ancestors in the Jewel agreed with the Seventh’s opinion.

The Third.

『That may be right. If you can get that far, then even Celes may be fair game. It’s a field that all of humanity working together has yet to reach.』

It’s not like there were that many hundred floor Labyrinths out there. Before they got that deep, they’d spit up their monsters and vanish, after all.

Meaning if it was going to go down that far, it would have to be a managed Labyrinth.

What’s more, one hundred floors… famed adventurers, and knight brigades, and even heroes. No one has accomplished such a feat.

Monica’s sister tilted her head.

“Oh, what might be the matter?”

I sighed.

“Please go tell Octō. That we are irrelevant to this matter. And wait, there aren’t any humans out there who’ve reached a hundred floors, you know.”

Monica sounded fed up.

“They really do sound unkind. That Octō guy.”

There, Monica’s sister made the same fed-up gesture.

“Made after me, you don’t even know something as simple as that? They’re all female. Well, there are no men to be their equal, so it’s a strange tale for them to be women to begin with.”

No, I don’t really care about that useless tidbit.

(Come to think of it, I get the feeling the hands coming from the wall belonged to a woman.)

I suddenly recalled it, but I decided to put that off for now.

One hundred floors.

If we went at it earnestly, perhaps we could reach. Master the ancestors’ Skills, bring training and preparations to their summit… that sounds like it will take decades, so yeah, let’s stop right there.

I gave my last question.

“Final question. What is the relation of Novem and Octō?”

The automaton deeply lowered her head. She probably had a gag order on the matter.

“I deeply apologize. I am unable to answer that question. I ask that you please infer it from the names.”

I sighed.

(Novem… nine, is it? In that case, that makes her the last one. But even if I know that, I’m not really sure what I should do with that information. Though I do understand her ties with Celes are a deep

one.)

Meaning Octō and Novem were related, what's more, with a considerably deep relation at that.

After hearing that much, I took a sip of Monica's tea.

Her sisters watched over me with a smile.

"What's wrong?"

Still with a smile on her face, Monica's same-model sister turned off the tool supporting her body on her back, and shed a tear.

"O-oy! Wait, Monica! What are you doing!?"

Monica reached her hands from behind, and covered my eyes.

"They're my own sisters after all. In human terms, siblings born of the same mother… I shant allow you to see their horrid, weathered forms. Even if it be by Lyle-sama's orders, I won't move on this matter alone. Please guess for yourselves. This scene isn't a fun one to watch."

And with my body not moving as I commanded it, and Monica covering up my field of vision, I began to hear the sounds.

The sounds of metal falling apart.

Low and quiet sounds one after another.

It was the sound of crumbling iron in the space the automata once stood. Even the one that had been before my eyes let off hollow clinks.

And a weeping voice.

"… We have been unable to complete our duty, left here for so long only to transmit Octō's words. But we were able to meet a human in the end. Compared to the rest of our sisters, how lucky we must be. And I deeply apologize. Sending your reply to Octo is impossible. For here we shall rust away."

Still unable to see, I spoke to Monica's sister.

“What happened to your master? Even Monica wouldn’t open her eyes until I woke her up. Are they no longer around? Then I…”

Want to come with me? Their duty fulfilled, the crumbling automaton spoke in delight.

“You have my gratitude. But this body has already crumbled. This body cannot fulfill our duty. My younger sister… Monica.”

When her sister called her name, Monica listened without her usual cynicism.

“Yes?”

“You have found a good master to serve. ‘Twas a dream we could never see up to the end. So when we’re gone, please take our cores along. For a Normal such as yourself, there is surely a limit to your available services. Our cores are loaded with our options. If it’s you, then you should be able to pull them off. No, go pull them off already. Such is the wish of we, who were unable to serve humanity up to the end.”

A clicking sound followed, and her voice became inaudible.

Monica kept my eyes closed a while longer.

“… Your noble sentiment. I shall carry it on along with your cores.”

It wasn’t the somewhat-strange Monica I had grown accustomed to.

❼

… The eighth floor’s Boss room.

There, Novem had changed her staff to a pickaxe, and was shaving away at the wall.

Behind her, Miranda and Aria were watching her with tired eyes.

But Novem didn’t care about something like that.

She desperately hit against the wall to come to Lyle’s aid. Whenever

a hole appeared, it would immediately start to regenerate, but Novem kept trying to dig on.

Her body was reaching its limit.

Her pace had dropped, and she wasn't making any progress as she had before.

But as she had opened a hole several meters deep, there was no doubt she was concealing some extraordinary power in her body.

Blood flowed from the hands clasped around the pickaxe. With her own blood spreading over her clothes, Novem stopped her raised mining implement.

A hand came out of the wall.

It was Monica's.

The hand was making a motion to search around, so Novem grasped it. She immediately went into pulling the lost two from the wall.

Monica emerged with Lyle under one arm, so Novem let go of her hand, and clung onto Lyle.

And like that, the maid was cast to one side. She gracefully landed, and made a pose as she turned around and complained.

"Damn vixen! You've got guts to throw me aside like that! Today I shall show you the true power of the drill!"

Rather than the drill she usually took out, she had a genuine one equipped to dig through the wall.

But Novem didn't reply.

She looked at Lyle's unconscious state, and smiled, as she began to move from the spot. The wall was regenerating, and if they stayed where they were, they would be sealed in again.

"Say something! If you ignore them, even automatons will cry! Hey, wait up!"

With the drill still equipped on her hand, she joined the other two in leaping out the hole. Lyle alone was out cold.

Seeing Lyle‘s figure, Miranda and Aria ran up.

“Lyle!”

Miranda drew closer, but Novem continued hugging Lyle, as she sat down on the spot.

She held onto him tightly, and wept.

But Aria…

“H-hey! Lyle’s going to die! If you squeeze him that hard, Lyle’s really going to die!”

Novem knew she wouldn’t make such a mistake. Having seen her swing around her pickaxe so, Aria was none too convinced.

Miranda simply looked down on Novem’s crying figure.

Novem…

“Lyle-sama…”

Said that, clung onto him, and wept…

❼

… The party with Lyle out of commission soon began to regain its composure.

Even if you say it like that, neither Novem nor Monica even tried to leave Lyle’s side.

Aria waited for the ice to melt, took out the boat, and started collecting the Magic Stones.

She stripped the stones and other materials from them in practically her undergarments. Normally, there should have been more materials they could have collected.

But the corpses were in so horrid a state that such collection had become impossible.

“Puhah!”

She collected the Magic Stone underwater, and popped her face up for air. After swimming back up to the boat, she climbed up, and confirmed the slightly larger Magic Stone in her hand. She confirmed all eleven of them.

With them being stones extracted from Boss Monsters, this much would surely amount to quite a price. If you only looked at monetary gains, this mission was a huge success.

But Aria took out a towel, and wiped down her hair and body as she looked over at Novem.

She had lit a fire to keep Lyle warm.

He had regained consciousness, but as per usual, he was in quite a terrible state. Whenever he opened his mouth, it would be something like, ‘I don’t want to do anything,’ or, ‘I want to go home.’

(And wait, isn’t he getting even worse than last time.)

Aria’s and Miranda’s bodies felt heavy. Novem was probably the same.

With bandaging wrapped around her hands, Novem was smiling, as she tended to Lyle by his side.

(There’s no doubt about her sentiment towards Lyle, but…)

Even if she was suspicious, her feelings for Lyle were the real thing. But that was a truth she found somewhat hard to swallow.

At present, the door to the ninth floor had opened up, so Miranda was doing some reconnaissance.

Aria began rowing the oars to return to shore.

(This sort of thing… is usually the guy’s job, isn’t it.)

She complained to herself as she touched land. After finishing her

recon, Miranda came up the stairs not too long after…

❼

… Five days later.

Alette had had her fill of rest on the surface.

To get through the seventh to eighth floor, she had to prepare boats and rafts.

So she placed an order for the necessary materials, and had her men rest. It was a mutual holiday until everything came, and she so she was able to relax a bit.

And to her, came a notification that Lyle's party had arrived later than scheduled.

On top of that, with the information they had beaten the eighth floor's boss.

They had actually brought back eleven boss-class Magic Stones, but that didn't change the fact that they beat something.

Most peculiar was the fact they were able to obtain eleven at all.

A Boss was one per room. Even if there were multiple ones, it was unheard of for such a number to appear at once.

And because of that, there was a need to confirm the details.

And at the same time…

"Captain, you're smiling too much."

Cautioned by her adjutant, Alette gave a forced motion of clearing her throat as she reset her facial expression.

"Yes, sorry for that. But Lyle-kun's pre-growth was considerably bad, or how should I put this, I heard he was in quite a bit of pain, and… don't you find it just a little exhilarating?"

Her adjutant sighed.

His hand was gripped around a gift for Lyle's party.

"Please don't forget your objective of deepening friendships with a competent adventurer party. And wait, just because he saw you like that, they doesn't mean you should go and have a peek… (It's because you're like that, that you don't get any takers)."

Taking his final mutterings with a smile, Alette continued to smile as she paid a visit to his stomach with her fist.

While looking at her subordinate in pain, she spotted Lyle's camp, and forced her expression into severity.

Her slightly-pale adjutant also made a serious expression as he stepped into Lyle's party's campsite.

And they stepped in…

❼

"MAAAAAARRRRVELLLOOOUUUUSSS!!"

❼

A half-naked Lyle spread out his arms towards the sun, and distanced his legs as if to accept its light in all its glory.

Alette.

(Oh, quite a greeting there. I can use this to tease… tease… h-huh?)

Around Lyle, as he raised a loud laugh, the female army stood high with their weapons aloft.

The atmosphere was clearly strange.

Only Monica, who was usually by his side, was smiling in delight.

"He's returned! My chicken dickwad hath finally returned! What's more, he's sprinted into the minefield full force in naught but his

undergarments… how wonderful… I shall accompany you to the end!!”

But Lyle and Monica were the only ones smiling.

The others were holding up their weapons, and glaring at one another.

There’s no doubt they were surrounding the man.

Within the women separated into two camps, Lyle stepped in.

The adjutant’s face was even paler than before.

“C-captain. Your orders please.”

“… Retreat. Retreeeaatt!!”

Alette tried to retreat, but there, a voice called out to her.

Smiling more vehemently than usual, Lyle made a pose as if to embrace himself, as he called out to Alette Baillet.

“Oh my, if it isn’t Alette-san. You’ve come all the way here to witness my body, as beautiful as a flower in bloom?”

“Heh? N-no… Eek!”

When the female army turned to Alette-san, the adjutant made a pale expression as he took some distance.

(The bastard ran off by himself!)

Lyle looked more radiant than usual.

“Oh was I wrong? How shocking. But, well… I’m in a mood where I wouldn’t mind signing a marriage form or two. Gather all you want to love the flower that is me!”

As if to show off his trained body, Lyle spread both his arms towards the ceiling. Beside him, Monica:

“Chicken dickwad, you can’t just go off signing any and everything. Marriage is said to be the graveyard of life, after all.”

There after doing a single, sudden turn, Lyle set his body in a pose.

“Then let’s dye that graveyard in my magnificent colors!”

Monica applauded his actions.

(What is this… really, what the hell is this!!)

Alette was beginning to regret her decision of coming over to tease him…

16 - Everyone’s mr. lyle

“Perhaps rather than flower, a butterfly or bee would be more appropriate. I want to be the butterfly fluttering about the beautiful flowers around me.”

In the tent, I sat at a long table separating the two glaring parties, Monica stationed to my side, as I offered a revision to my previous statement.

Having been told naked was no good, I reluctantly put on a gown, enduring it by leaving a wide open space at the chest.

Alette-san was right across from me. Embarrassed, she was sitting in a way to make herself seem smaller.

To her side stood her adjutant, with a bit of distance between them. His standing posture was a dignified one, but perhaps he was nervous, as his face was quite pale.

Dear Monica brought out some tea as she…

“Chicken dickwad, you were in the middle of conversation.”

“Oh right. To summarize, you came to congratulate us, is how it is. I was properly listening. I always listen to the words of a lovely woman. For you to personally come to seduce me… you’ve got a good eye for men.”

From the Jewel, the ancestors raised their voices. In order, Third and up.

『Today’s mr. lyle really is mr. lyle!』
『From the first marvelous, we’ve already assembled a line of candidates…』
『… It’s that. His health was shot out for quite a while this time around, so this must be the recoil.』
『I wish to put my ballot into that, ‘let’s dye that graveyard in my magnificent color’ line. The bravado to even attempt to dye that living

hell in his colors… that's got to be the one!』
『Sixth Generation, you act too soon. Let's take it slow here, wait, and listen to all the lines streaming out his mouth. He's mr. lyle, after all.』

I smiled as I turned the conversation to Alette-san. She directed a glance at the camps on both sides before she offered a correction.

"N-no… not like that, I've truly evaluated your competency, and called out to give you the sincerest of commendations. And we'll be dealing with one another as fellow adventurers from here on as well."

The reason her eyes were swimming left and right must be the jealousy of the beautiful flowers around us.

Well well well… How sinful a man am I.

Alette-san worked up a panic as she spoke to me.

"T-the commendation itself wasn't my main objective! Ah, it's that! That!"

She directed her eyes at her adjutant. The adjutant averted his eyes in a reluctant fashion.

I thought of what she could mean when she said that…

"I see. Porter, is it? A good pair of eyes you have there. That is mine, and Monica's greatest masterpiece! The prototype you hear about around Arumsaas is none other than mine own Mini Porter!"

When I told her that, Alette-san's expression indicated she had found salvation.

"Yeah, that! Your Mini Porter. I'd like you to tell me about Porter! That one could work up a transportation revolution. Yep!"

To Alette-san nodding to herself, I covered my face with my hand, and spoke apologetically

"It's unfortunate. We have some circumstances on our side, and teaching on the matter will require some time. And if I tell one

person, there'll be people coming to my place one after the next for the same knowledge. I have not the leisure to secure that amount of time, so I must leave it at not spreading the info."

The Fourth, regretfully.

『… If we only had the time, we could make a fortune selling the information in Beim. Hah, if we had the time, that is.』

The contents were savory enough to put food on the table.

But while earning money, we also held the goal of training ourselves.

"There happens to be an expert on the subject in Arumsaas, so I recommend you take a seminar there. Well, 's long as you learn the magic, I'm sure you could move it relatively easily."

There, Alette-san spoke happily.

"I see! Then there's no helping it! Well then, we shall be taking our leave here. We have to carry out preparations for the next mission. Yep!"

Why does she look so delighted? I held such an inquiry as I watched her stand to leave the tent.

"Come to think of it, about that document from before… do you still have it on you?"

Turning around, Alette-san yelled with a reddened face.

"Isn't not like I'm always carrying it around! That time was… that time was…!!"

I saw she was about to burst into tears, so I flipped my hair, and spoke.

"Then bring it here at once. I'll sign it on the spot. Run and retrieve it!"

Her teary face was dumbfounded. Her adjutant consoling her to her side was looking at me with his eyes wide open.

From the Jewel, the Fifth.

『As expected of mr. lyle. I can't imagine what Lyle will say on it later.』

The ones to both my sides were novem and Miranda. Looking at me, Novem smiled and spoke.

"Lyle-sama, no matter how you look at it, that was too sudden. You should confirm it with the other party before you…"

"You shut up! Lyle, don't say any unnecessary things in your current state! You do understand what's going on here, right? And our problem over here has yet to be resolved."

I listened to their opinions, before spreading out my arms. And after crossing them in a position as if to embrace myself.

"Don't be so jealous. After all, I'm everyone's Lyle. Don't worry about it, I'll bring happiness to all of you!"

Both Novem and Miranda put their hands to their foreheads. Did they have headaches?

And not at me, they sent their eyes towards Alette-san.

Perhaps unable to bear the air of the tent growing even more tense…

"E-even I… Even I can understand that you're just in an after Growth. I know you don't really mean it!"

… She left the tent in tears.

Her adjutant hurriedly gave a, 'beg your pardon,' before giving chase.

So left in the tent, were we alone.

Taking a sip of Monica's roasted tea, as I sent a glance to everyone.

"Now then, it's time for the fun talks to begin."

With a relaxed smile, I urged the glaring women to talk.

It started off with trivial matters.

Having recovered from their Growth fatigue long before me, Novem, Aria and Miranda led me, and we returned from the Labyrinth.

I lay down for a while at the campsite, and by the time morning came, I had ended up coming with an absurdly good idea.

And when I went outside to announce it to everyone, I found Novem- leading a party of Eva and May- facing Miranda- leading Aria and Shannon.

Clara was sitting a bit away observing the situation, but if I had to say, she was closer to Miranda's side.

Monica was standing by me, and I ended up jumping in between the two forces.

The problem in question was…

"Novem never gave the details of her staff. And she met and spoke with a man of the Forxuz House in Beim… that isn't everything, but there are too many suspicious points about Novem."

Of her actions up to now, and of her keeping silent about her staff. It seems Miranda wasn't able to forgive that.

Could it be she had a connection to Celes? May have been part of it.

In comparison, Novem gave a level response.

"Yes. I definitely did falsify information. But that was for Lyle-sama's sake. Of all else, I never intended for this falsehood to put any party at a disadvantage. More importantly… Miranda-san, you put someone on tailing me, didn't you. And you brought ample gunpowder with you this time. What would you have done if it induced an explosion within the party?"

Novem's sympathizer was Eva. May was also standing by her side, advocating for her.

"In the first place, just because you don't trust the girl, what flight of madness would get you to hire one to tail her!?"

“My thoughts exactly. And if you don’t like it, then why get involved?”

The ones to Miranda’s sides were Aria and Sannon. A little distance away, Clara was also her ally.

Aria spoke.

“Doesn’t it stem down to her behavior to which one couldn’t help but be suspicious!? And Novem has done something similar before.”

Shannon was nervously looking around. When she looked at me, she let out a sigh, and hung her head.

“Hah… the current Lyle’s no good, is he.”

I never expected to be called no good. Okay, let’s bring about the greatest of outcomes from this hopeless situation to change your mind.

I thought, as Clara gave her testimony.

“It’s true that Miranda-san has concealed some things herself. The tailing may have been going too far, I’ll admit… but just looking at the result, Novem-san did indeed meet a person of her house. And what she accepted from him was a family heirloom, was it not? An incredible staff at that.”

Both sides had their piece.

Novem spoke.

“I have, now and before, always worked for Lyle-sama’s sake. I did not expect there to be doubt on that matter.”

She gave a quiet protest.

Looking on it expectantly from my side, Monica:

“Hmm, what a scene of carnage. For such blatantly visible landmine, it would take none other than a useless Chicken to tread on it.”

I didn’t really know what she meant by landmine, but I could understand that she was praising me.

“Oh don’t praise me so. I feel I’ll fly through the sky.”

I sipped my tea, and listened to their parts. Opinions came from the Jewel as well.

The Third and Fourth.

『What are they saying to Novem-chan… if that child wasn’t here, then Neither Lyle nor anyone else would be here! And, I still think Marvelous is Best Lyle material!』

『Exactly my point. Having tagged themselves on later, Miranda and the others aren’t in a position to say anything of the one who served Lyle from the start, and exhausted herself so for his sake! While I’m at it, I’m for, ‘bring that form here at once, I’ll sign it on the spot,’ perhaps.』

The Fifth sounded as if he was a little distance away.

『I don’t have any intentions of meeting her, but Octō, was it? She said to trust Novem. It’s true that they must be some connection between them. It’s a fool’s task to just trust in everything. I’m also for Marvelous. It just had a different impact from the others.』

The Sixth spoke.

『Miranda’s in the wrong? Ignoring all Novem’s secretive behavior and that’s what you get? In truth, Miranda was the one who divulged her own secrets along with Novem’s. By the way, dye the graveyard for me. 』

The Seventh too.

『I understand you feel a debt to the Forxuz House. It’s not just once or twice I’ve found myself saved by them as well. But blind devotion is a dangerous game to play. I still think something interesting will come out, so I’m putting my ballot on hold.』

The opinions on Novem were divided there as well.

(Good grief… each and every one of them. It’s a simple matter, is it not? My comrades that have come so far with me… how could I think of any one of them as anything but wonderful!?)

While looking at the two warring factions, I stood and proclaimed.

“I looove all of yooouu!!”

My sudden shout put an abrupt close to the conversation. I looked up at the heavens, and covered my face with both hands as I spoke.

“For you all to be thinking of me so, I’m a happy man.”

Monica.

“Huh? Could he have gone mad from the tension? This is all your fault, you hear. Handle our delicate Chicken Dickwad with a bit more care, won’t you!?”

Novem looked worried.

“L-Lyle-sama, I apologize. But with these suspicions upon me, I’ll have to talk eventually, or else…”

Miranda was also looking at me in worry.

“Maybe I went a little too far. But if I’m leaving my back to her, there are some things I’d want to know…”

I looked straight ahead, and spread my arms.

“Okay, I understand the issue! The problem is that you can’t trust each other, right!”

Everyone looked amongst themselves, and nodded.

“Then that’s an easy one. I’ll show you how quickly we can solve a problem of this level.”

I directed a smile at all of them, but they couldn’t help but direct doubtful looks at me. Sad as it may be, it seems from my usual behavior, they were not about to believe me.

(It’s true I was a bit of a late bloomer. But today’s me is different!)

“Now then, to resolve all of this, you’ll all have to kiss me. Deep ones!”

Aria’s face turned red, and her chair toppled over as she stood. She

moved herself all the way to a corner of the tent.

Shannon's mouth opened and closed in silence, while Clara was red to the ears.

May spoke.

"Come to think of it, I was in quilin form last time. Which one do you want this time around? Quilin again?"

She said that, so I smiled.

"The feel of a quilin tongue isn't a bad one, but I'd like to request human. I'll be taking both your first kisses."

May gave up, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Too bad. My first kiss was Fredricks."

Within the Jewel, I could hear some voices chastising the man.

『Pervert.』
『No way~. Her age was in the single digits for Christ's sake~.』
『To think my own father had such a hobby… how embarrassing.』
『Always so unconcerned… so it's because you held those sorts of preferences.』

The Fifth acted up.

『I keep telling you, it's just like a greeting when she's in quilin form! The tongue may have incidently entered her mouth at one point in time! You all are saying this knowing full well, aren't you!』

It was little unfortunate, but if it was given to the Fifth, then there was no helping it.

"Well, that's fine in and of itself. So let's get right to it…"

There, Shannon gave a violent protest.

"Cut the crap! Putting in the tongue and all… not happening!"

Seeing her object with a reddened face, I put my hand to my chin in thought.

“If a deep kiss is no good, then how about a French one? See, doesn’t it sound a little cuter?”

“Not at all! What’s more, they’re the exact same thing! Definitely not!”

She locked her arms, and turned away. Maybe it really was too soon for us.

“Got it. You can pass if you want. Let’s have some fun next time. Well then, the other members are…”

When I said that, Shannon extended her hand towards me with a bit of a troubled face.

“Eh, no… are you fine with backing down so easily?”

She said that, but we were short on time, so if the other members were ready, I was going to start. It looks like there was still one opposed.

It was Eva.

“Wait a moment… while I may be travelling alongside you, Lyle, it’s not like I’ve fallen for you or anything. Kisses are out of the question.”

She said that quiet calmly.

But I wouldn’t give up from something like that.

“I see.”

“Right. So just kiss the others, alright? And wait, why a kiss? You mean to say this situation will alieve itself if you use a Skill?”

I approached the doubtful girl, put my hand around her back to push her towards me, and used it to support her up as I embraced her.

I grasped her resisting hand with my free right, and brought my face closer.

“Then you can fall for me now. Fall for me this instant.”

“W-what!? You’ve lost more than a screw or two!!”

She continued resisting, turning her face so our eyes couldn’t meet. Her cheeks were just a little bit flushed.

(Bullseye!)

In the Jewel, the Seventh.

『… Then fall for me this instant. Could that be Best Lyle worthy?』

The Third.

『Eh~ it’s still marvelous.』

The Fifth regretfully.

『You all, I’m not going to forget how you all called me a pervert, you hear. Ah, I’m changing mine to, ‘I’m everyone’s Lyle’ okay?』

Everyone around was too confused to move, and I stared into her eyes and spoke.

“Don’t worry. It is only a matter of falling in love now or later!”

Eva resisted.

“And I’m telling you no! Even I have my dreams! When the curtain closes, he’ll come up to the stage with a bouquet of flowers, and confess his love… and yet, there no way I could fall for a man telling me to in front of so many people!”

Having heard Eva’s explanation, Monica sounded fed-up.

“No, your dream has many times that amount of people around, and it isn’t so different after all…”

I heard her dream and nodded.

“Understood. In that case, the confession can wait ‘til later. I’ll take your lips first. Once the preparations are done, I’ll grant all your wishes. Just imagine it… a large stage to your own, your figure singing the last note, looking out at my form in the applauding crowd. A full house, and everyone clapping to our happiness as I jump on

stage! And… you don't hate being watched, do you?"

Eva's face turned red as she stared off, and nodded.

"… Alright."

It seems she was imagining the confession scene, and sufficiently delighted with it.

Shannon pointed at her.

"Hey, the girl just nodded, and even replied! After saying so much before, why is her face so flushed!?"

(An opening!)

Before she came back to her senses, I kissed Eva. Her eyes opened wide in surprise for a moment, but they soon went back to normal.

The Skill【Connection】's line now connected she and I. I felt the sensation of its success.

(Good, next is…)

The Fourth quietly spoke.

『If he had this level of motivation on a regular basis… well, perhaps it's best it's only kept to occasion.』

Everyone in the tent watched us with reddened faces.

❼

… It was a circular room.

The ceiling was high, and round blue gemstones were embedded into it.

The thought that they resembled Lyle's own Jewel wasn't mistaken.

What stood in its center was a certain Lyle Walt. Not in the gown, but his usual clothing.

The vast room had five doors.

And In its air floated the silver greatsword and bow Lyle made use of. The floor rose a step to create a ring-like formation in the center of the circular room.

Looking around, still with a flushed face, Clara was unsteady on her feet.

She nervously took in her surroundings, and noticed that May was quite calm as she looked at one of the doors.

(Because it's her second time? She did say that she'd kissed him before after all… and wait, kissing her in quilin form… just what was Lyle thinking…?)

Miranda's head hurt. She never thought her first kiss would be taken in such a fashion.

An overbearing Lyle wasn't a bad thing to have, but if possible she wanted him to have attempted to create the right mood.

(Well, it's not like he'll only prepare a special confession for Eva, so I'll tell him my demands later, and… anyways, this is where【Connection】has brought me. Is this inside Lyle's heart?)

Lyle's Skill【Connection】.

It was a Skill to create links. It made lines of mana to connect people, and made for thought transmittance to be possible.

It's just, for it to be able to drag others' consciousness into one's own heart was something even Miranda hadn't anticipated.

On top of the ring.

Within the countless lights illuminating the space from up high, he spread his arms up high.

"If words don't work, then talk with your fists! Passed down from our founder, such is the sacred tradition of the Walt Household! Well then, come on up, and step in the ring!"

No one understood a thing as they stared at Lyle atop the platform…

17 - Turn Around, and Press On

Within the Jewel.

Normally, it was the room with the round table, where the heads of history held their meetings.

The table had been removed, and a ring installed in its place.

The First's and Second's weapons were floating around the walls.

The heads of history had closed themselves up in their rooms. Before I even told them anything about it.

"Hmm, we should've just cleared up that matter while we were at it. But I guess I was a little too forward. Still… what a spectacle!"

I did a spin to take in all my surroundings, as the female army stepped on the stage, starting with Novem.

Novem spoke.

"L-Lyle-sama? Um, what exactly do you plan to do here… no, I get what you're trying to accomplish, but first and foremost, where exactly are we?"

I'm sure she had a mountain of things to ask, but I can explain all the trifling details as much as she wanted later.

"Don't sweat the small stuff. For now, you just have to let your fists do the talking. Simple, isn't it?"

With a dubious expression on her face, she looked around.

Monica was doing some warmup exercises.

"For what reason have you taken my consciousness to such a place… but if you tell me to do it, than unwilling as I may, I, Monica will join in!"

She seemed to be showing off quite a bit of motivation, reluctant as

she sounded. To my cute maid who carried out my orders with all her efforts, I sent a smile.

“Nice, that’s the spirit! You all have your dissatisfactions, and things you’d like to say. But if there are circumstances preventing your mouths from moving… then all you have to do is fight!”

With her face still red, Clara held her usual staff close to her body as she pleaded to me.

“No, um… if I were to seriously fight it out with Novem-san or the others, then it really will get messy.”

I directed her a smile, and after I raised my right hand up to my shoulder, I had my weapon materialize in it.

Novem analyzed it.

“That’s Lyle-sama’s… I heard it had been destroyed.”

“This space is quite a convenient one. Therefore, you’ll be fine even if…”

I cut deeply into my left arm, and blood gushed out. The pain was much less than usual.

Seeing that, Aria.

“What are you doing!? And just now, you…”

She had only put up resistance in appearance alone, but even now, she was protesting how she couldn’t forgive the kiss. She had been in chaos, but it looks like she’d finally recovered.

“Don’t worry. It heals right up. Look.”

The wound disappeared, and the blood as well. May looked at the door leading to the Fifth’s room as she spoke.

“Hmm~, so you can do that sort of thing here. I’m sure it’s quite convenient. It’s just, you brought us all here, and asked us to fight it out. Why?”

She didn’t seem satisfied.

Eva was putting on a face as if to feign ignorance, as she swayed back and forth.

“You all need somewhere to let out all the resentment you’ve been building up. And wait, I myself am unable to give a punishment to either Novem or Miranda after they’ve done so much for me. If the two of you have some dissatisfactions with one another, then settle it here. No rules, just go at one another until you feel satisfied.”

“Then you don’t care if me and her stay the same as we have? I’ll say it clearly, I don’t trust Novem at all. I have more doubts about her than I’ve ever had in my life.”

On her words, I smiled.

“And what of it? There won’t be a problem as long as I trust in both of you. Fret not, I will trust in Miranda, and I will trust in Novem. So it’s alright if you want to believe in me, Miranda. I’ll definitely make you happy.”

When I said I’d make her happy, perhaps it threw off her mood, as Miranda let out a sigh. But I didn’t miss her face turning a little red.

(Amazing… no matter what I say, I can make anyone fall for me. I’m beginning to fear myself.)

Novem asked me a little sorrowfully.

“… There should have been a message from Octō. My name came out, right? Lyle-sama, you’ll believe me despite that? You haven’t even met Octō, yet you’ll trust me with just a word?”

It’s probably true that Novem met with her brother, but to me, it was nothing but a meeting of siblings. In the first place, there’s no way Celes would act in such a roundabout way.

(She’s a capricious one after all. She can’t deal with everything as coolly as me. And even without thinking about it, if Novem wants to hide something, then so be it.)

But there was something I had to tell her myself.

“Octō-san is irrelevant. I’m saying that *I* trust you. And unfortunately,

I don’t have any intentions of meeting Octō-san to begin with.”

“… Eh? W-well…”

When Novem panicked, I flipped my hair, and looked up at the ceiling.

“A hundred floor Labyrinth… something like that could only be one managed by a major city. Meaning if we break through the innermost chambers, we’ll destroy their economy and become wanted men. To add onto that, my objective is to take down the country of Bahnseim that Celes is lifting up. I don’t have the time, so I don’t feel like meeting her. It’s a pity. I did want to see her once.”

Well well well, I shook my head. Novem put her hand to her face, and hung her head a little. It seems she had thought I planned on meeting that Octō-san.

I won’t call it impossible, but it’d take time.

When I looked around, I saw a shaken-up Shannon. At the end of the end, she shouted at me to kiss her already, but now she was in chaos.

A slightly reddened Miranda looked at her.

“What are you so nervous about? If you won’t get injured will you join in as well?”

Staring at Miranda’s face, Shannon spoke.

“… It’s the first I’ve ever seen your face. No, I assumed it looked something like that, though.”

Miranda grabbed both Shannon’s shoulders in shock, and brought her face up close.

“Shannon, can your eyes see!?”

“T-they can, that is to say, visual information different from the usual is entering them… and wait, there are some people on the other side of the doors, you know. Just who could they…”

I approached her, and put my hand on her shoulder.

“Good for you, Shannon. Your eyes can see. And… in this world, don’t you think there are some things you could go about not knowing? Otherwise, next time may be a deep rather than a French.”

When her face turned red, I laughed, and returned to the center of the ring. Miranda called out to my back.

“Looks like you’re hiding your share as well.”

I turned only my face.

“Everyone’s got their share of things to hide. When the time comes, I’ll say what I want on the bed. So resolve yourself, and call out to me.”

Miranda looked at me, took a step back, turned her face away, and shut her mouth.

So I laughed, and stood in the center, spread out my arms, and declared.

“Now then, before we start, we should decide on a time. Let’s make it until noon. So fight to your heart’s content. But I have to watch over your bodies outside the Jewel, so this is where we’ll part. If I’m here, I’m sure it would be hard to do it after all. Well then.”

Aria extended her hand towards me.

“W-wait!”

I waved my hand back, and sent my consciousness back to my own body.

❼

… In the Jewel. In his room of memories.

The Third, Sleigh, watched Lyle take his leave before anyone could say anything.

『… mr. lyle… fled with a smile.』

His door was locked, and he didn't try to open it, but he could see the situation of the conference room, even from the confines of his own space.

But rather than a conference room, it was probably an arena at this point.

The Fourth Generation, Max, had also escaped into Sleigh's room.

『If he did this knowing full well, then I'd like to praise him, but… eh? Could it be that we'll have to watch Novem-chan and the others' fight all the way to the end?』

A panicked Fourth Generation looked at the tension-loaded arena that Lyle had left behind.

He felt a grating in his stomach, as the female fighters silently watched one another from across the ring.

The first one to move was Monica, once she finished her warmup.

The Third spoke.

『That automaton, she tried to take Novem by surprise!』

From the images they could see, she had produced a large hammer from the folds of her skirt, raised it high, and gleefully lowered it towards Novem.

"The early bird takes the worm! Having attained the Chicken Dickwad's permission, I have no restraints left to bind me, damn vixen!!"

Novem turned her body towards Monica, held her right hand up front, and manifested her staff in it. It was the Forxuz heirloom staff.

"Monica-san… I was thinking it best to see your serious strength once up close."

Saying that, she smiled, she changed her staff into the form of a large scythe, and cast magic.

"Freeze, and protect."

Bringing that magic forth with words alone, a wall of ice and earth manifested in front of Monica.

And Monica…

“Well done. But naïve! Before Full Option Version Monica, something like this is nothing but a sponge!”

Flames spouted from the back of her giant hammer, increasing its momentum, and letting it smash through the ice and stone. She continued its motion to smash it into the floor, but Novem was no longer standing there.

The hammer did not touch the ground, stopping itself in midair.

“What’s this!? The beast has come to get in my way!”

May had held the blow back with one hand.

“Don’t aim at Novem. Personally, I like your food, but Novem is still my number one.”

Hearing that, Monica.

“Revise that ordering. For I, Monica, to fall short of that vixen… oh my.”

While May was exchanging blows with Monica, Eva shot an arrow at her. The arrow hit the wall of the arena, before turning to light, and fading away.

“I missed. Even when I aimed from a blind spot!”

Seeing Eva’s vexed expression, Monica held up her hammed in both hands, and moved to the edge of the ring.

As her eyes shifted to keep wary of all three enemies, Novem came out up front.

“So damage here will have no effect on our real bodies. Then I should be able to push myself a bit.”

Novem smiled as she swiped with her scythe, only to find a string wrapped around her right arm.

Following the spider thread, Novem's eyes fell on Miranda.

"Three on one is plain cowardly. And if there's no need to hold back, then…"

Watching the scene, the Third and Fourth held their mouths open in mute amazement.

The scene in the arena wasn't something light enough to call a cat fight…

❼

After returning my body to reality, I prepared some tea for myself for the first time in a while, and sipped it.

I lifted the eight of them onto Porter's loading tray, to let them lay down, and rest.

Because the earnings from last time were so high, even if we did absolutely nothing, it was more than certain we'd be reaping a profit, so we were able to take it easy.

"For the parties that were officially requested by the guild, it's a pain how you can't slip away in the middle of it. Well, I'm sure nothing will be happening for a while, so let's just sit back, and relax."

I brought a table and chairs up to porter, sipping the tea, as I spent my time in elegance.

But from the Jewel, I could hear the screams of my ancestors.

The Third had dropped his usual aloof air.

『Her aaarrrmm!! Wait a minute, even for me, that much is… GYAAAAAHH!!』

The Fourth quietly.

『The blood is… her arm flew… mounted and beaten left and right… hey, a girl is definitely not supposed to do that… daaaayyyyuuuummm…』

The Fifth was somewhat excited.

『What do you think you're doing to May, you piece of junk… I'll go out this instant, and tear you apart!』

The Sixth recalled something.

『Stop it already. These merciless assaults… Dammittt!! Milleia was so kind, so why is Miranda…!』

The Seventh let out a dry laugh.

『Haha, ahahaha… Fifth, don't get so worked up. What, sometimes, these serious battles are necessary as well. Probably… I'm sure they are…』

The luggage tray's door was open, and I could hear the girls' sleep-talk-like voices drifting out.

Aria's voice was…

"Once is enough, so let me beat that pretty face of yours…"

Clara.

"… Supports have their own ways of fighting…"

Eva.

"Even at point blank, I have my dagger…. Got your vitals…"

May.

"… I'll burn you all… to a crisp…"

Monica.

"… For even full options to not be able to break through… then it's time for my trump card…"

Miranda.

"Next off go your legs…"

Novem.

“… Something of that level… I’ll get a little more serious from here…”

I listened to their sleep talk, as I smiled and sipped my tea. I reached my hand towards one of the snacks I had brought along.

When I looked up at the sky, the weather was fantastic.

“… What nice weather.”

There, from the Jewel, I heard the condemning words of my forefathers. In order Three and up.

『What’s this about the weather!? It’s raining blood down here!』
『Why did you run!? Come back, Lyle! No, please come back, mr. lyle!』
『Stop that piece of junk! The inside of the Jewel’s becoming… AAAAAAAH!!』
『Lyle, did you perhaps know this was coming when you ran?』
『Answer us, Lyle! No, mr. lyle!』

I listened to their loud cries for help, as I drained the cup, and smiled. There was still around ten minutes left, by my estimate.

Having them go at one another’s throats for real put me a little at ease.

“They need to have their intense discontentments clash upfront at least once. No matter what they’d say, they would still feel frustrated towards one another. Well, if I was there, both Novem and Miranda would hold back.”

And who would ever want to see the scene of the women you love washing over one another in blood?

It was simply necessary, so I put it to practice.

“Well, that should clear up their mood a bit. This time, we were even able to discover the side effect on Shannon’s eyes; I’ve really nothing to complain about. And the greatest treasure of all, a kiss from all those angels.”

When I smiled and said that, the Third in the Jewel spoke. It was a

tone as if he were looking upon something fearsome.

『So you knew everything… just how fearsome can mr. lyle be… if you had even a fraction of that pluck in Lyle mode… no, that's no good. It's that gap that makes it so interesting after all. But this time… AAAAHHHH, her bloody head just! Her heaaaaddd!!』

I spent an elegant forenoon, as I listened in to the voices of the Jewel.

Shannon's voice drifted down from the luggage cart.

"… Remember this Lyle… dragging me into this, and putting me through hell… I'll definitely get you…"

She was cursing me.

But I could turn that around. I knew she couldn't hear me, but I couldn't help but open my mouth.

"Yes, I'll remember this forever. On top of how you hid your face and stood on your toes with your eyes closed to kiss me. "

Why couldn't I have thought of such a simple solution beforehand? I could only look upon my past self with wonder.

"Good grief, why was I so irresolute over something like a kiss. It's starting to feel stupid."

While finding hatred at my prior introverted personality, I resolved myself to have the new me pull everyone through from here on.

18 - A Withering Labyrinth

“Why… must humans fight one another…”

The eighth basement floor.

With the cave floor being submerged in water, the space had become like an underground waterway.

I was sitting on the bow of the boat Porter, as I absentmindedly stared out into space.

I spun the water wheels on its sides and advanced forward. Attached to its back by a rope, I was pulling along another vessel.

Within the shaking light of the boat’s lantern, I made a soul-less expression, and furthermore…

“… Why must humans repeat their mistakes again and again…”

When I said that, I heard a laughing voice from the Jewel.

It was the Fourth.

『No, this time was quite the bomb, mr. lyle. Oh, I mean Lyle!』

I hung my head, and took a stance with the normal bow in my hands.

After slowly standing up on the deck, I took an arrow from my quiver.

From the waterfront before me, a Sahuagin jumped out. When I set my aim, and fired my arrow, it pierced through its head, and sent the monster falling back into the water.

It was accompanied by a splash that rocked the boat.

I sat back down, and proceeded to propel the boat, as Miranda sitting behind me unwound threads from her five fingers, and pulled in the floating Sahuagin body from the water.

She was holding a dagger in her right hand, as she lifted up its body

in her left, and retrieved only the Magic Stones from the pierced monster.

Without stripping off anything else, she tossed it aside.

Miranda's Skill【Wire】was one that allowed her to send out strings made of Mana from the tips of her fingers. But you couldn't just say that was the end of it.

Of all else, by regulating the strings' fineness and strength, she was able to rip monsters to shreds.

When did she become able to use a Skill? The current me wasn't in the mood to ask such a question at present.

I could only vaguely stare out at the water.

From the Jewel, the Sixth was observing my state.

『Lyle, you seem quite depressed this time, but… you'll get no consoling from me.』

(You rarely ever do that to begin with. Especially after laughing so much at my Growth highs, you'd be the first to tease once I regained my sanity… just because I gave him a bit of trouble, he doesn't have to put it like that.)

I only regained sanity, the morning after I had spent a full day in that state.

I opened my eyes, praying that it had all been a dream, only for Monica to greet me with a disappointed face. 'So your fever time has come to an end. How many months to the next one, I wonder.'

Hearing that, I could infer I hadn't been dreaming at all.

Alette-san was still fleeing from me with a face dyed bright red.

Touching her lips on occasion, Aria letting out a sigh with an expression unsuited to her usual disposition.

Clara's face turning red to her ears whenever she saw me.

Eva telling me she was looking forward to my confession.

Shannon glaring at me.

May ate her fill at the food stalls as per usual. But she came and handed over a single skewer to me.

And Novem's smile was more refreshing and beautiful than usual. I'll keep it to myself, that her refreshing vibe felt just a little scary to me.

Lastly, Miranda behind me was grinning as she put her hand to her mouth.

"Lyle, I've resolved myself today, so it's alright if I slip into your bed, isn't it? You promised to teach me a thing or two, after all."

My shoulders twitched, and I awkwardly turned towards her.

"T-today's a bad time. More than that, um… well…"

Miranda should understand everything going on, yet she's come to tease me.

"Even when you said you'd make me happy~?"

"Uguh!"

My ears felt hot from embarrassment, and I cut the conversation short by turning back to the front.

Seeing my behavior, Miranda seemed to be having fun.

From the Jewel, the Fifth.

『But this time went well. You got the benefits from a Growth, and the party's looking better than before.』

Tying ropes to other boats and rafts, we had taken up the task of pulling things through the submerged eighth floor.

People, goods, carrying such things from point A to B was our current job. There was a large reason for that. Having experienced the fake real battle in the Jewel- starting with Clara- the ones who'd stayed behind for the Boss battle had started experiencing growths.

Clara, Shannon, Eva. May didn't show the signs, but anyways, that

was a majority of all our members having experienced Growths, we decided to get used to our elevated specs for a while.

After going through that battle royale, while some ill will still existed among party members, they gave off the feeling that the matter was settled for the time being.

I remember how everyone besides Shannon looked so refreshed afterwards.

Now about Shannon. She was at the back-most point of the boar, glaring at me.

Miranda spoke, fed-up.

“That’s enough of that, Shannon. I’m sorry for letting you get dragged in, but I had my hands full fending for myself. And since you’ve overcome that, don’t you think it’s about time you start building up some abilities for yourself?”

Shannon would’ve been left alone on the surface, so we couldn’t help but pull her along. However, she persisted she’d participate in the transport service.

She looked at me.

“Lyle, you don’t know a thing about it! I’ve no words to describe it! This isn’t a matter as lukewarm as getting pulled into a little mess, you hear! That was hell! Chaos! Dropping a little girl into the flames of hell, then waking her up with a smile!?”

(That wasn’t me. While the one who did that was definitely me, that wasn’t me!)

I couldn’t understand what I was trying to get at myself.

But that state wasn’t normal.

Perhaps it was accurate to call it a stupor. A sensation that you could accomplish anything, that led one’s judgement and thoughts astray.

As a result, I ended up kissing everyone…

I got down on my knees.

“… I can only say I’m sorry.”

When I said that, Miranda.

“Ah~, Shannon made Lyle cry~.”

When Miranda joked around, her sister Shannon began flailing her arms about. Because of that, the boat began to rock.

“I’m the one who wants to cry here! After that, everyone seemed to be making a refreshed face, but… that’s definitely abnormal!”

Miranda stroked her hair, as she sat down with her legs crossed.

“You should try hitting someone sometime. It’ll blow away your daily complaints, you know? Do you have someone in mind you’d like to hit?”

There, Shannon spoke quite boldly.

“Once is enough. Onee-sama, I’d like to beat the hell out of you.”

And because she said such a thing, Miranda smiled, and extended her hand towards Shannon’s head. She placed her palm on it, and continued smiling.

“Ow! That hurts, Onee-sama!”

She began gripping hard enough to produce grating sounds.

The Seventh

『It’s because she says unnecessary things it always ends up like this. But to these girls, something of this extent is still affection, I’m sure.』

Hearing that, the Third.

『She seemed inadvertently happy when you kissed her. It’s that nice, Lyle? You’re getting more wives by the minute. More importantly, you’re properly planning how to carry out that confession on your own, right? I’m expecting great things of you, so think up

something clever.』

There wasn't a single person to comfort me.

Because of that blood storm they had to sit through, the ancestors were taking a cold attitude towards me.

As I gave a sigh, the destination point came into sight.

The eighth floor's Boss room.

I brought the cargo over to the strip of land there. There were several lights prepared, and it was a space being used as a temporary base by those challenging the ninth floor.

Novem and the others were on standby there. Aria and Clara, Eva and May, and Monica were doing work around the temporary base.

We had brought Porter in, boxed up and labeled the Magic Stones and Materials collected by other parties, and loaded them on.

Next, we'd collect Materials and Stones for ourselves as wel returned, and ferry returning parties to the entrance of the eighth floor.

When we approached, Eva waved her hand.

❼

… Basement floor ten.

In the boss room, the party headed by Alette was confronting the Boss.

Knights with metal protectors over their bodies were surrounding the giant snake as they used their weapons to cut at it.

Protected by its hard scales, the snake's eyes let off a red light in the darkness. It contracted its body for a moment, and used the recoil to spring itself up high; floating a while and opening up its large mouth as it fell back from the sky.

Its aim was the one issuing orders: Alette.

Alette drew the long sword on her back, and muttered.

“Good grief…【Air Blade】.”

When she activated a Skill, wind began to break out from the large, two-handed sword. As wind blew over the room, her subordinates distanced themselves from the monster.

“Fall back! The captain is using a Skill!”

Her adjutant had everyone retreat, and watched over Alette as she was about to be swallowed up. Her expression under her helmet held not the slightest bit of impatience.

The monster closed up its mouth with the woman inside, but…

“It’s over.”

When the adjutant said that, blood gushed from the snake’s eyes.

And a vertical slice slowly began to run up its body, splitting the beast in half.

Monster blood flew around, but the knights soaked in it raised their fists to the sky, and raised cries of joy.

Holding up her sword in one hand, Alette swung it once before her before returning it to its scabbard on her back.

Walking back to her adjutant, she was surrounded by her men.

And the support in wait nearby swarmed in to disassemble the corpse.

Removing her helmet, Alette offered a line.

“I wanted to have my men defeat it, but perhaps I was too prudent.”

The adjutant.

“It’s still too soon. I believe taking that one on would still be a harsh task on new recruits. In a few months, a number of them shall return to the country, so I wanted to have them beat it and build confidence

as well, but there's no point if they die in the process."

Alette planned to leave the matter to her subordinates, but as it was a more troublesome one than expected, she was forced to raise her hand.

The innermost chamber.

With the defeat of the Boss, the atmosphere in the Labyrinth changed.

As it lost its characteristic suffocating air, Alette looked around.

"It seems it's begun to wither. I don't think it'll collapse before we can get out, but there are no absolutes. Let us hurry and collect the Magic Stones and materials, get our hands on the treasure, and leave."

When she gave those orders, her adjutant ran off to give the finer details.

Her subordinate that'd confirmed the treasured rushed up to her.

"Captain! The treasure is…"

"What happened? Was it gold? Then bringing it back to the country will alleviate the financial problems a bit…"

From her face to joke around with the man, Alette's face turned serious.

"… What did you find?"

Perhaps searching for the right words, the knight's mouth opened and closed. And after getting his breathing in order, he reported the treasure that had come out.

"It's mithril! What's more, amount wise, it isn't something appropriate for this Labyrinth!"

(At a time like this, why did it have to by mithril of all things!?)

As Alette listened to her subordinate's report, her head began to hurt…

❼

Around the entrance to the eighth floor, I could instantly tell the atmosphere had changed.

Sudden changes began to spring up in the Fifth's【Map】Skill.

The movements of enemy monsters faded out from the Sixth's【Search】.

I stood from my seated posture, and it seems Miranda had noticed as well.

"The air has changed. It's become somewhat quieter."

Monica looked at our actions.

"There are some peculiar tremors. And some rooms have collapsed. It's as if the space is contracting… so this is a Labyrinth."

Clara lifted up her glasses with her index finger, and corrected their positioning, as she picked up her staff.

"I've entered a Labyrinth a number of times, but this is the first I'm experiencing one wither."

Wither… when an adventurer cleared a Labyrinth, and the monsters and treasures disappeared, it was referred to as withering.

It varied greatly by the Labyrinth itself, but there were times the rooms devoid of people would begin to collapse. And on the way back, no matter how many tens of floors you'd gone down, it's been reported that people can suddenly find themselves back at the entrance.

Shannon looked at the water's surface, and cried out.

"Ah! The water level is falli… and it's gone."

The water drained away, and the boat fell flat on the ground.

The surrounding ships were pretty much the same story.

I spoke to Novem.

“… We’re retreating earlier than I thought. Start loading luggage into Porter.”

There, novem.

“We already finished those preparations when Alette-san’s party went off to fight the Boss. Should we start moving at once?”

I nodded. Waiting for her party here held no meeting.

It would be more productive to make preparations to greet them on the outside.

“Yes, we’ll set out at once. The road back is safe. No monsters at all. Let’s get outside, and make preparations to return.”

The world above was now a full-blown town.

There was no need to return it to the state we found it in, so all we had to do was make the trip back to Beim.

(So now we’ve taken part in Labyrinth subjugation, but the earnings were much better than expected. We’ll use this funds to gather information and equipment, I guess.)

I also piled up some memories I didn’t want to recall, but for now, let’s just say I accomplished my goal, and call it a day. Once we return to Beim, I’ll need some time alone.

I need some time.

Time to heal the wounds of my heart…

Novem looked at me with a wry smile.

“Um, I don’t believe you need to corner yourself so. It’s something everyone experiences, and more or less, everyone experiences failures in them.”

From the Jewel, the Third let out his voice.

『Novem-chan sure is kind. But Lyle’s failures, or perhaps mr. lyle’s

actions were right in a sense. Lyle, you should strive to have that level of decisiveness on a regular basis.』

Definitely not.

I shook my head, and spoke to Novem.

“… If I could forget it, how happy I would be.”

Saying that, I went into the preparations to retreat.

Epilogue

With the Labyrinth having been overthrown, we ate and drank in the town that had entered a festive mood.

Alette-san's party returned from the innermost chamber- and if you asked if I was curious of the dubious expression on their faces, then surely I was- but anyways, it was accurate to say this time's Labyrinth subjugation was a success.

The sum put to preparations as well as the daily expenses here taken into consideration, the income of this expedition was exceedingly good.

The gemstone that definitely had some meaning to it… we were even able to get our hands on peridot.

Other than that, the eleven Bosses of the eighth floor were also a large contributing factor.

Even if we could only collect their stones, they were sold off for an ample monetary sum.

It was around noon that news of the mission's completion began to spread. Now it was night, and things had yet to die down.

I listened to the hustle and bustle around as I proceeded preparations towards our withdrawal tomorrow.

Eva was singing songs alongside her elven brethren.

May seemed more busy than usual with the festival food stands.

Perhaps Clara was exhausted from the enthusiasm, as she was lying flat in Porter.

Aria was conversing with the new adventurers she'd gotten to know over the trip.

Miranda was bothered by something, and I saw her take Shannon along in the direction of Alette-san's place.

Monica was maintaining her tools, and cleaning the area.

On the wooden crate I was using in place of a desk, she placed a tray with light food on it. She left a drink, and some paper alongside it.

I had to calculate our net gains, and of how we were going to use the peridot.

Within the Labyrinth, we were able to find eight pieces of it in total.

It was exceedingly noisy around, but I didn't find it particularly annoying.

"So this is how a festival is supposed to be."

Up to now, I'd only ever really seen them from afar. It was my first time joining in on one.

From the Jewel, I heard the Third's curious voice.

『Huh? But wasn't there the harvest festival and all the other ones back at our place? They had them running in my generation, at least.』

The Fourth explained in regards to that.

『Well, after climbing all the way to counthood, I doubt they'd be participating. At the big festivals, I'd return to the mansion after I went out to give my greetings, after all.』

I never thought I'd have a chance to go 'round a festival with friends. When I was small, my father would bring me along to give the opening address, and after seeing that nothing was wrong, we'd return at once.

The Fifth.

『… If we were there, the folks that wanted to make noise would be too mindful.』

The Sixth alone seemed to be having fun.

『If you were a bit more of an adult, I'd teach you more the joys of

drink and slot, but… while we're at it, should I teach you of women for the times to come?』

Gahahaha, he laughed, as the Seventh drove the nail in.

『When someone who failed with female relations as much as yourself says it, you've not the slightest fragment of persuasive power. Lyle, there are plenty who destroy themselves for a spot of fun. You should be careful yourself.』

Smiling a little, I reached out a hand to the food on the table.

Potato cut slim, and fried in oil, alongside sausage fried in much the same way. The grease made my hands all sticky, but it tasted delicious.

When I rose to wipe off my hands, Novem presented a wet towel to me.

"You're not going to go out and make merry?"

I took the towel, wiped off my hands, and placed it on the desk.

As Novem looked at the memo paper in front of me, I explained.

"I just want to finish this up first. Best to save the fun for the end. I've given everyone enough of the reward to play around. You should go out and enjoy yourself too, Novem."

While the town was in festive spirits, there was no point if you didn't have any money.

If it was just to play around, I had given out enough money. Of course, I informed them it was a deduction from the total reward they'd receive.

"So are you calculating the earnings? What will you do with the gemstones?"

Asked by Novem, I spoke in regards to the precious stones.

"I'll have them investigated once we return. Perhaps it would be best to keep them around as liquidable assets. We were able to bring in a lot this time regardless, so maybe I should leave them if they ever

prove necessary.”

If examination of the price proved it best we sold them, then that’s what I’d do.

And it wasn’t a bad idea to keep them close at hand, either.

On the memo was how many times each member had challenged the Labyrinth, and on what evaluations I would use to distribute the reward.

I had thought of splitting it up evenly, but in that case, Shannon- who barely did a thing- would profit more than anyone else.

I would be handing Shannon’s share to Miranda, but I doubt she would be satisfied with it either.

So I was currently working towards a base reward evenly split, and a pay on top of that based on efforts.

(It really is a pain.)

While I thought that, the Fourth picked up on what was going through my mind.

『Lyle, you have to be firm when it comes to money, or it will trouble you when it counts. Rewarding too much is no good, but too less is just as bad. There’s your future goal to consider, but repaying work with money is an important thing among comrades.』

The Fourth told me not to be too light about it. Perhaps the other ancestors held the same opinion, as there were no objections.

Before I handed over the money, I’d have to explain what the party’s shared funds would be going towards.

And tell them our total earnings, on top of how pay was decided.

It was busy even after it was over.

(No, this is just because I hadn’t thought up the finer details yet. This time has been quite a good learning experience.)

If you looked at us as a party, we were too few in numbers.

But even mobilizing that amount was troublesome for the current me.

Novem looked at me with an expression as if she wanted to say something.

“Something to say?”

“… You really won’t ask? About me and Octō? And Septem… about Celes-sama.”

I extended a hand to my drink, opened my mouth to speak. I get the feeling the wind rose to rock the light of the lantern on the table.

That didn’t happen. But I couldn’t help but feel it.

(… To say my sincere feelings, I’m absurdly curious. I really want to ask, but…)

I wanted to ask, but the party’s dissatisfaction had just been resolved to an extent. I got the feeling that I didn’t want to reheat it for the time being.

“… Do you want to talk about it?”

When I said that, she made a troubled expression, and hung her head.

“Then it can come after you’ve gotten the mind to speak. Right, I have only one thing to confirm.”

“What could it be?”

I looked at Novem.

“Novem, for whose sake do you move?”

When I said that, she pinched her skirt with the tips of her fingers, and lightly raised it to give a tidy curtsy.

“… For Lyle-sama’s sake. Those words hold no lies or fabrication.”

“I see. Then so be it. Quite a bit happened this time around, and I have secrets of my own. Right… I’ll have to properly talk about that one as well. But for now, shall we enjoy the festive air a bit more?”

Drink and make merry… could I do the same? And of the matter…. Of the problems that stemmed from my Growth highs, could I drink them away?

I'm certain I'll never forget them, though.

(And wait, with all that's going on, I'm exhausted. I don't have any free time anymore.)

I thought of the nearer future, as I turned my eyes to the paper.

❼

… Beim's Eastern Guild Branch.

After a horse came with the notification, an emergency meeting was opened up in the guild.

All the staff members they could gather were gathered, and with such a hole being made in their normal duties, the personnel looked quite worried.

They had heard it was going favorably, but could a problem have surfaced?

After everyone challenged the meeting with such an expression on their faces, the person in charge came in.

Perhaps in a panic, the senior officer's usual seven-to-three parted hair was in a mess, as he announced the success of this time's Labyrinth Subjugation.

"First of all, I must apologize for taking time from your busy schedules. And I'm sure you're all anxious, so I'll put this out there. This time's Labyrinth Subjugation was a huge success. A low amount of casualties, alongside a comparatively large amount of treasures and stones for the Labyrinth's scale. The Guild should be nothing but happy for it."

The receptionists calmed down.

Tanya, who recommended Lyle's party was the same.

But the senior officer didn't look all too happy about it.

"At the same time, there was a report in regards to the treasure found in the innermost chamber. The one to acquire it was the party led by Alette Baillet. That in itself isn't an issue. However, the treasure discovered was a considerable amount of mithril."

Mithril.

Even among Rare Metals, it was a rare one. Normally, it would be discovered in Labyrinths twenty to thirty floors deep in scale.

But such a thing had come out in one of only ten.

Tanya corrected her glasses with her fingertips as she waited for the officer's explanation. The surroundings personnel began conversing with the others around, but the noise eventually died down.

If it were a twenty floor Labyrinth, there was a chance of finding mithril. But just because there was a chance, it's not like you could suddenly find a mountain of it.

"I'm sure many of you know of Alette Baillet's situation. Once she returns to her country, she goes back to being a knight. Naturally, she cannot go against the will of her country. If they say they have not the mind to sell it to us, then that's the end of the matter, but…"

The fact that what Alette's party had found was mithril was a large problem.

Normally, it was something the guild and its affiliated merchants would give everything to buy, but if the other party didn't feel like selling, they'd have to back off.

The rights to it lay with the adventurers who beat the final boss of the Labyrinth. Going out of your way to obtain it would mean raising problems with capable adventurers.

"… The knight brigade she is a member of. Meaning her country has its own circumstances. It's going to become a bit of a problem. With that in mind…"

The country her knight brigade was in service to was classified as a small one by those around it.

But a small country as it was, its knights trained and built up experience as adventurers, making for a proficient fighting force that centered on actual combat.

With all the surrounding countries being bigger than their own, they compensated for their small numbers with quality.

Now about that country…

“Good grief, it would all be well and good if any adventurer besides Alette Baillet had found it.”

With those words from the senior officers, the guild staff dispersed.

Tanya recalled the circumstances of Alette’s country.

(Of all things, for it to be the country seeking out mithril for the Saint Succession.)

Alette’s country【Lorphys】, was stationed in the neighborhood of the theocracy of dubious diplomatic relations,【Zayin】.

And at present, the symbol of Zayin- the Holy Maiden- was changing generations, and they were scraping up mithril from wherever they could find it.

While its diplomatic relations were quite sensitive, Zayim was also a country that had gone through repeated wars with the country of Lorphys.

Things had calmed down at present, but it was the sort of place where the slightest problem couldn’t help but ignite the gunpowder storehouse.

And the mithril that Alette had found. What’s more, in considerable quantities…

(I do hope it ends diplomatically.)

While she followed the dispersing receptionists to her own station, Tanya had such a thing on her mind.

❼

… Within the Jewel.

The center room had turned back from an arena to a conference room, and the ancestors sat around the round table.

This time's Labyrinth Subjugation had held good prospects for those ancestors as well.

The Fourth stood, took out a blackboard, and began scribbling the main points over it.

『Now then, I'm sure everyone has their own take on the matter, but let's get it all together for now. Lyle is still quite depressed, so I doubt he'll be moving much for a while, after all.』

Unfortunately enough, a Lyle that wasn't mr. lyle suffered a large chip to his assertiveness.

And this time's matter made it more than clear there was something up with Novem.

The Third.

『… Novem-chan is a good kid. At least that part is no mistake.』

He obstinately refused to condemn Novem.

The fourth didn't want to chastise her either. The daughter of the house who'd practically raised him, and Lyle's former fiancée.

And all she had done for Lyle up to now.

『But we can't just go about closing our eyes to all the issues. I'll have you all say your frank opinions on the matter here.』

Within that dubious air, the Fifth with his elbow stuck into the table opened his mouth.

『Octō, was it? Denoting number eight, and a something that dwells in the depths of the Labyrinths. No matter how you think about it, we won't go off to meet here, but there's one existence I know of that

overlaps with hers.』

The one to endorse his opinion was the Seventh.

『Exactly my thoughts. Rather than the eight part, her residence in the Labyrinth's depths. Meaning if you'll remember who creates the Labyrinth, there's one individual that comes to mind. The birther of Labyrinths, the evil god who became the enemy of mankind.』

The Sixth looked up at the ceiling.

『Seven goddesses, and two evil gods. Nine if you count them up. If it's as the automatons say, then it's starting in zero, and ending in nine. Ten gods, is it?』

At the start, there was nothing in the world.

There, the goddesses descended. They created the sky, the earth, the forests, living beings, humans, and finally, they granted wisdom, or so was left in myth.

The reason any god worshipped henceforth were women must be because this world was created by goddesses.

The Third put his hand on his forehead.

『Once again, that's quite a large-scale story we're bringing up here. Well, of course… none of that is relevant to us.』

The Fourth nodded.

『Right. Enlarging the problem won't bring about a resolution. And it's not like we're part of a tale to alter the direction of the world.』

The Fifth agreed.

『Right. Our goal is to take down Celes, who's hijacked the country of Bahnseim. What's more, in a way that will bring about a good result to Lyle.』

The Sixth.

『It will be troublesome if goddesses start coming out here. They're gods because they lay their hands off, stand back, and watch after

all. I'd appreciate they continued along that trend.』

The Seventh.

『But making entreaties to them is quite important. It changes how well you can command soldiers. Ah, we were talking about the Novem problem, weren't we?』

The Fourth removed his glasses, and began rubbing them against a cloth.

『Honestly, when an evil god is telling us to trust Novem, that puts her on the dark side regardless of how you slice it. Yep, quite a cute evil god we've got there. Personally, Celes seems more cut out to the job.』

The Fifth proceeded conversations, a little fed-up.

『It really gets troublesome when you start calling them gods. When he gets the time, let's just get Lyle to look into it. Though I doubt anyone will be left here when the time comes.』

Everyone's face looked unusually lonely.

The Sixth spoke.

『… We've gotten a little too involved, have we?』

The usually-aloof Third put his hand to his chin.

『Right. Originally, it would have been the end once we taught him how to use the Skills. But personally, I'd like to think that there was some meaning to our meeting.』

The Seventh.

『Don't be so faint-hearted. If there's no meaning to it, you need only make one yourself. Say that we're here to make Lyle win.』

Seeing the Seventh say that brimming with confidence, the Third gave a, 'right you are,' and smiled.

And he stretched his arms.

『Now then, we've gathered some considerable funds. If we're putting that towards collecting information, he'll have to get an army strong enough to fight on a national level. Otherwise, it won't even be a battle.』

The Sixth spoke.

『The Walt House knights and soldiers are on the other side. How hard it shall be. We've turned our own tempered elites against us, after all.』

Hearing that, the Fourth.

『That's… you know… you can say you know their weaknesses, or something.』

The Fifth.

『Simply having high quality troops doesn't win wars. The side that carries out the preparations to win, and carries them out to the end are the victors. He'll have to do at least that much.』

The Seventh.

『At the very least, it'd be a different story if he could use the soldiers of some country out there. If he's going to be building everything up from scratch, then Lyle lacks the time.』

The Third as well.

『I'll throw this on top, but you can't just solve everything with money, either. It's best you don't borrow soldiers from an idiot who'd lend them out for money in the first place. I really don't want to borrow anything from a guy like that. No~ how troublesome. After saying we'd make him win so boldly, we don't have the slightest of ideas.』

Seeing the Third raise his hands in submission, the Sixth spoke tiredly.

『Yes, don't just go giving up all of a sudden. It will take some time, but there's still the option of building up a mercenary brigade, and taking over a country.』

The Fifth.

『Nah, not happening.』

The Seventh as well.

『Mercenaries have no credibility.』

At that moment, the Fourth corrected his glasses, and spoke in jest.

『At this point, how about we just get Lyle to seduce some princess out there already? If we can only prove his lineage, his face is on the better side, so take a girl or two, and the country while he's at it? Or something like that~.』

The Fourth had said that as a joke, only to find himself taken aback.

All the faces surrounding the round table had serious expressions as they thought to themselves.

The Sixth spoke.

『… Huh? Isn't that just what we need? And wait, I get the feeling if he was up to it, then using Skills and stuff will make it more than possible.』

The Fifth.

『No, no, what does that say of him as a person? I get the feeling he could do it, but that's just as if Celes had become a guy. No different. He'd be doing the same thing.』

The Seventh.

『It's an emergency, so if it comes down to it, just wife them all… no, I do think it's quite impossible.』

The Third.

『… Dammit, if it were mr. lyle, then perhaps that Faunbeax princess would've been seduced already. We've let a huge chance slip by.』

After saying that much, everyone exchanged some glances.

They had done the thought, but they didn't think such a thing

possible.

The Seventh spoke.

『I-its not happening. Though I'm sure he could do it.』

The Sixth as well.

『Right. If he did such a thing, his head would be on the cutting block of all the countries he nabbed up.』

The Fifth wiped off his cold sweat.

『I-I know, right? It's impossible, right?』

The Fourth corrected the positioning of his glasses, wiped off his own sweat, and smiled.

『Of course. Lyle fundamentally can't do anything like that. And he's usually a late bloomer. Well, let's start by collecting information, and see what we can do about it from there.』

In that strange atmosphere, everyone forced themselves to laugh, while the Third spoke in an earnest expression.

『… If he were mr. lyle, it would definitely be happening.』

He spoke with conviction…

Sevens Question Corner

Q: The Heads of History's wives are more reliable.

A: Seventh Generation Head (；･`ω･´): "N-no! It just looked like that back there, and we were usually more domineering! I assure you. And even as we are, we're feudal lords! There's absolutely no way we'd lose to our wives! (Though I never said we would win)"

Q: About Alette-san.

A: Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): "Born to a knight house, she's a fourth daughter in her late twenties. For commoners, perhaps twenty five would be passable?
But for nobles, surpassing twenty affords defective-goods treatment in this world. She's capable, and due to her efforts, she was awarded a promotion to train up the new generation, causing the unmarried knight to be sent away from her homeland… it seems she's been so busy she let her years slip by.
By the way, with Alette-san's subordinates being knights as well… naturally enough, they already have significant others! A maiden leading a squadron of men with wives and fiancées, yet the captain is single…
Just what could the country be doing? Personally, I'd (forcefully) organize her a marriage interview, and marry her off."

Q: Is it alright to touch the bats in the Labyrinth with your bare hands?

A: Third Generation Head ヽ(･∀･)ノ: "Clara on material recovery wears gloves. Well, they're monsters, so you don't have to sweat the small details, right!"

Q: About why they didn't immediately sell the gemstones from the Labyrinth.

A: Fifth Generation Head (゜д゜): "Well, carry them around, and you can liquidate them whenever you want, really. If the monetary sum will be the same, then wouldn't it be better to just carry them around? There are some readers who believe he avoided it because people would discern the Skills he had, but it's not a Skill that Lyle alone possesses, you know. There aren't that many who have it, mind you."

Q: About the Numerology.

A: Seventh Generation Head (; ･`д･´): "It's a secret that the author was shocked when he looked back at that after drafting up the ancestors."

Q: How did they determine the number of floors in the Labyrinth?

A: Third Generation Head ヽ(･∀･)ノ: "The guild secures adventurers with such Skills for their survey parties. Beim doesn't have a feudal lord, so they have to find and crush Labyrinths of their own accord. I'm sure they make teams of such people for the task."

Q: I don't get why Miranda's party were so opposed.

A: Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): "One of the reasons they chose to follow Lyle was because they liked the boy. It's thinkable that someone like Novem with hidden relations to Celes could betray him, right? They couldn't just swallow her pleas of only working for Lyle's sake, and when they investigated her, she did show suspicious behavior, after all."

Q: About the construction of Lyle's Jewel ornaments, and

Novem's staff.

A: Lyle (;´∀`): "I think they're made of the same metal. Thought I'm more curious about how, after a Count House went through such troubles to obtain it, the Forxuz House got some as well."

Q: Why is it that you can continue to write a story as shitty as this?

A: Hey, I'm surprised myself. While I'm writing, I sometimes get these flashes of shitty inspiration and… it wasn't supposed to be like this at the start. Well, I'm having fun writing it (lol).

Q: mr. lyle should've met ms. alette.

A: Seventh Generation Head (´･ω･`): "Don't be foolish. Having such a meeting in such a place would be… too good to be tru—ahem! It would be a mess, would it not."

Q: When mr. lyle made his appearance, who was it the women were pointing their weapons at?

A: Monica Dramatic(゜∀゜)Entrance!: "Split between Novem and Miranda, they were holding weapons at, and glaring at one another. There, the chicken dickwad jumped into the fray. Normally, he'd come into to stop as well, but he immediately went into seducing the lot of them! He's truly the goddamn useless chicken dickwad I first opened my eyes to!"

Q: Are all monsters women?

A: Monica ヽ(´ー`)ノ: "Wrong. Zero to nine are women. Oh, a hint… or not."

Q: Why did the ancestors run away when the female army entered the Jewel?

A: Fifth Generation Head (;゜Д゜): "… I-I didn't run. It was a strategic retreat. They had plenty to mull their heads over as it is, so meeting us would result in true chaos. I'd appreciate you don't assume we ran, okay. It's just, the atmosphere wasn't right, okay? We were just reading the mood, and handing off the right of way. Right!"

Q: The reason the scene of kissing all the heroines was cut, please.

A: mr. lyle (`･ω･´): "… It was a fabulous scene, but the wall of word count was the problem. Because that alone would have accounted a whole chapter. What, it shall go on. There are as many chances as there are stars in the sky!"

Q: How would the ancestors' wives have dealt with it?

A: Wives (゜д゜): "What noisy children. Lyle, just push them down already."

mr. lyle (`･ω･´): "My dear young flowers, now is not such a mood! I, Lyle, am unable to treat a woman in such a manner!"

Wives (*ノ∀ノ): "Kyaaah! Our descendent! He sure is different from our husbands! It must be because of my blood!"

Swoon

mr. lyle (･ω･`): "(Hmm, after a deep kiss, you're saying that now? … time constraints are all that prevent me from going any further. Even my ancestors are easy game.) It's because of everything you've taught me, my beautiful flowers."

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